













# S E R M O N S

O N

## SEVERAL SUBJECTS,

By THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

Late Lord Archbishop of CANTERBURY.

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TO WHICH IS PREFIXED,

A PREVIEW of his Grace's LIFE and CHARACTER.

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but*

## C O N T E N T S.,

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[ 1 ]

A  
R E V I E W  
OF THE  
LIFE AND CHARACTER  
OF  
ARCHBISHOP SECKER.

**D**R. THOMAS SECKER, late Arch-  
bishop of *Canterbury*, was born in the  
Year 1693, at a small Village called *Sibthorp*,  
in the Vale of *Belvoir*, *Nottinghamshire*. His  
Father was a Protestant Dissenter, a pious,  
virtuous, and sensible Man, who, having a  
small paternal Fortune, followed no Profes-  
sion. His Mother was the Daughter of Mr.  
GEORGE BROUGH, of *Shelton*, in the County  
of *Nottingham*, a substantial Gentleman-  
Farmer. He received his Education at several  
private Schools and Academies in the  
Country, being obliged by various Accidents  
to change his Masters frequently. Notwith-  
standing



standing this evident Disadvantage, at the Age of Nineteen he had not only made a considerable Progress in *Greek* and *Latin*, and read the best and most difficult Writers in both Languages, but had acquired a Knowledge of *French*, *Hebrew*, *Chaldee*, and *Syriac*, had learned *Geography*, *Logic*, *Algebra*, *Geometry*, *Conic Sections*, and gone through a Course of Lectures on *Jewish Antiquities*, and other Points, preparatory to the critical Study of the *Bible*. At the same Time, in one or other of those Seminaries, he had the good Fortune to meet, and to form an Acquaintance, with several Persons of great Abilities. Amongst the rest, in the Academy of one Mr. JONES, kept first at *Gloucester*, then at *Tewkesbury*, he laid the Foundation of a strict Friendship with Mr. JOSEPH BUTLER, afterwards Bishop of *Durham*. At the last of those two Places it was that Mr. BUTLER gave the first Proof of his great Sagacity and Depth of Thought in the Letters which he then wrote to Dr. SAMUEL CLARKE; laying before him the Doubts that had arisen in his Mind, concerning the Conclusiveness of some Arguments in the Doctor's *Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*. These were written with

so much Candour, Modesty, and good Sense, that, on the Discovery of his Name, they immediately procured him the Friendship of that eminent Man, and were afterwards printed at the End of his *Evidences of Natural and Revealed Religion*. This Correspondence was entrusted in Confidence to Mr. SECKER, who, in Order to keep it private, undertook to convey Mr. BUTLER's Letters to the Post-Office at *Gloucester*, and to bring back Dr. CLARKE's Answers.

Mr. SECKER had been destined by his Father for Orders amongst the Dissenters. With this View, during the last Years of his Education, his Studies were chiefly turned towards Divinity; in which he made such quick Advances, that, by the Time he was Three-and-twenty, he had read over carefully a great Part of the Scriptures, particularly the *New Testament* in the Original, and the best Comments upon it; *Eusebius's Ecclesiastical History*, the *Apostolical Fathers*, *Whiston's Primitive Christianity*, and the principal Writers for and against Ministerial and Lay-Conformity; with many others of the most esteemed Treatises in Theology. But though the Result of these Enquiries was (what might naturally be expected) a well-grounded Belief of the Chris-

tian Revelation, yet not being at that Time able to decide on some abstruse speculative Doctrines, nor to determine absolutely what Communion he should embrace; he resolved, like a wise and honest Man, to pursue some Profession, which should leave him at Liberty to weigh these Things more maturely in his Thoughts, and not oblige him to declare, or teach publicly, Opinions which were not yet thoroughly settled in his own Mind. Therefore about the End of the Year 1716 he applied himself to the Study of Physic; and after gaining all the Insight into it he could; by reading the usual preparatory Books, and attending the best Lectures during that and the following Winter in *London*; in Order to improve himself still more, in *January* 1718-19 he went to *Paris*. There he lodged *au Cloître St. Benoit, Rue des Mathurins*, in the same House with Mr. WINSLOW, the famous Anatomist, whose Lectures he attended, as he did those of the *Materia Medica, Chemistry, and Botany*, at the *King's Gardens*. The Operations of *Surgery* he saw at the *Hôtel Dieu*, and attended also for some Time M. GREGOIRE, the *Accoucheur*, but without any Design of ever practising that or any other Branch of *Surgery*. Here he became acquainted

quainted with ALBINUS, afterwards Professor at *Leyden*, Father MONTFAUCON, and several other Persons of Note. Here too was his first Knowledge of Mr. MARTIN BENSON, afterwards Bishop of *Gloucester*, one of the most agreeable and virtuous Men of his Time, with whom he quickly became much connected, and not many Years after was united to him by the strongest Bonds of Affinity, as well as Affection.

During the Whole of Mr. SECKER's Continuance at *Paris*, he kept up a constant Correspondence with Mr. BUTLER, who before this Time had taken Orders, and on the Recommendation of Dr. CLARKE, and Mr. EDWARD TALBOT, Son to Bishop TALBOT, was appointed by Sir JOSEPH JEKYLL, Preacher at the Rolls. Mr. BUTLER took Occasion to mention his Friend Mr. SECKER, without his Knowledge, to Mr. TALBOT; who promised, in Case he chose to take Orders in the Church of *England*, to engage the Bishop his Father to provide for him. This was communicated to Mr. SECKER in a Letter from Mr. BUTLER, about the Beginning of *May*, 1720. He had not at that Time come to any Resolution of quitting the

Study of Physic; but he began to foresee many Obstacles to his pursuing that Profession; and having never discontinued his Application to Theology, his former Difficulties, both with Regard to Conformity and some other doubtful Points, had gradually lessened, as his Judgement became stronger, and his Reading and Knowledge more extensive. It appears also from two of his Letters still in Being, written from *Paris* to a Friend in *England*, (both of them prior to the Date of Mr. BUTLER's abovementioned) that he was greatly dissatisfied with the Divisions and Disturbances which at that particular Period prevailed amongst the Dissenters. In this State of Mind Mr. BUTLER's unexpected Proposal found him, which he was therefore very well disposed to take into Consideration; and after deliberating carefully on the Subject of such a Change for upwards of two Months, he resolved at length to embrace the Offer, and for that Purpose quitted *France* the latter End of *July*, or Beginning of *August*, 1720.

On his Arrival in *England* he was introduced to Mr. TALBOT, with whom he cultivated a close Acquaintance. But it was unfortunately of very short Duration. For in  
the

the Month of *December* that Gentleman caught the Small-Pox, and died. This was a great Shock to all his Friends, who had justly conceived the highest Expectations of him, but especially to an amiable Lady whom he had lately married, and who was very near sinking under so sudden and grievous a Stroke. Mr. SECKER, besides sharing largely in the common Grief, had peculiar Reason to lament an Accident that seemed to put an End at once to all his Hopes; but he had taken his Resolution, and he determined to persevere. It was some Encouragement to him to find that Mr. TALBOT had on his Death-bed recommended him, together with Mr. BENSON and Mr. BUTLER, to his Father's Notice, Thus did that excellent young Man, (for he was but Twenty-nine when he died) by his nice Discernment of Characters, and his considerate Good-nature, provide most effectually in a few solemn Moments for the Welfare of that Church from which he himself was so prematurely snatched away; and at the same Time raised up (when he least thought of it) the truest Friend and Protector to his Wife and unborn Daughter; who afterwards found in Mr. SECKER all that tender Care and

Assistance which they could have hoped for from the nearest Relation.

It being judged necessary by Mr. SECKER's Friends that he should have a Degree at *Oxford*; and he having been informed that if he should previously take the Degree of Doctor in Physic at *Leyden*, it would probably help him in obtaining the other, he went a little before *Christmas* from *London* to *Rotterdam*, and thence to *Leyden*. He took his Degree there, *March 7, 1720-1*; and, as Part of his Exercise for it, composed and printed a Dissertation *de Medicinâ Staticâ*, which is still extant, and is thought, by the Gentlemen of that Profession, a sensible and learned Performance. GORTER, in his Treatise *de perspiratione insensibili*, printed at *Leyden* in the Year 1736, makes a short but respectful Mention of it in his Preface. After paying a Visit to *Amsterdam* he returned by the Way of *Helvoetsluys* and *Harwich* to *London*, and on the 1st of *April, 1721*, entered himself a Gentleman-Commoner of *Exeter College* in *Oxford*; about a Twelvemonth after which he obtained the Degree of *Batchelor of Arts* in that University, without any Difficulty; in Consequence of the Chancellor's commendatory Letter to the Convocation.

He now spent a considerable Part of his Time in *London*, where he quickly gained the Esteem of some of the most learned and ingenious Men of those Days, particularly of Dr. CLARKE, Rector of *St. James's*, and the celebrated Dean BERKELEY, afterwards Bishop of *Cloyne*, with whom he every Day became more delighted and more closely connected. He paid frequent Visits of Gratitude and Friendship to Mrs. TALBOT, Widow of Mr. EDWARD TALBOT, by whom she had a Daughter five Months after his Decease. With her lived Mrs. CATHARINE BENSON, Sister to Bishop BENSON, whom in many Respects she greatly resembled. She had been for several Years Mrs. TALBOT's inseparable Companion, and was of unspeakable Service to her at the Time of her Husband's Death, by exerting all her Courage, Activity, and good Sense, (of which she possessed a large Share) to support her Friend under so great an Affliction; and by afterwards attending her sickly Infant with the utmost Care and Tenderness, to which, under Providence, was owing the Preservation of a very valuable Life.

Bishop TALBOT being in *November* 1721 appointed to the See of *Durham*, Mr. SECKER was in *December* 1; 22 ordained Deacon by him



him in *St. James's Church*, and Priest not long after in the same Place, where he preached his first Sermon, *March 28, 1723*. The Bishop's domestic Chaplain at that Time was Dr. RUNDLE, a Man of warm Fancy, and very brilliant Conversation, but apt sometimes to be carried by the Vivacity of his Wit into indiscreet and ludicrous Expressions, which created him Enemies, and on one Occasion produced disagreeable Consequences. With him Mr. SECKER was soon after associated in the Bishop's Family, and both taken down by his Lordship to *Durham* in *July 1723*.

On the Death of Sir GEORGE WHELER, in 1723-4, the Bishop gave his Prebend of *Durham* to Mr. BENSON, and the Rectory of *Houghton le Spring* to Mr. SECKER. This valuable Piece of Preferment putting it in his Power to fix himself in the World in a Manner agreeable to his Inclinations, he soon after made a Proposal of Marriage to Mrs. BENSON abovementioned; which being accepted they were married by Bishop TALBOT in *King-Street Chapel*, *October 28, 1725*. At the earnest Desire of both, Mrs. TALBOT and her Daughter consented to live with them, and the two Families from that Time became one.

Not long before this, Bishop TALBOT had given the Rectory of *Haughton* near *Darlington*, to Mr. BUTLER. There was a Necessity for rebuilding a great Part of the Parsonage-House, and Mr. BUTLER had neither Money nor Talents for that Work. Mr. SECKER therefore, who had his Friends always in his Thoughts, and was now in great Favour with his Patron, persuaded him to give Mr. BUTLER, in Exchange for *Haughton*, the Rectory of *Stanhope*, which was of much greater Value, and without any such Incumbrance. In the Winter of 1725-6 Mr. BUTLER published the first Edition of his incomparable Sermons. Mr. SECKER took much Pains to render his Style more familiar, and his Meaning more obvious. Yet they were at last by many called obscure. But whatever requires Attention is not of Course obscure. No one (as Dr. CLARKE rightly observed on this Occasion) ever imputed Obscurity to *Euclid's Elements*. Difficulties they may have, but Difficulties soon mastered by the Degree of Attention which such Subjects require.—Mr. SECKER gave his Friend the same Assistance in the Discourse prefixed to the *Second Edition*, and also in that noble Work, which he afterwards published, *The Analogy of Religion, Natural*  
*and*

*and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature.*

He now gave up all the Time he possibly could to his Residence at *Houghton*. He applied himself with Alacrity to all the Duties of a Country Clergyman, and supported that useful and respectable Character throughout with the strictest Propriety. He omitted Nothing which he thought could be of Use to the Souls and Bodies of the People entrusted to his Care. He brought down his Conversation and his Sermons to the Level of their Understandings; he visited them in private, he catechised the young and ignorant, he received his Country Neighbours and Tenants kindly and hospitably, and was of great Service to the poorer Sort of them by his Skill in Physic, which was the only Use he ever made of it. Though this Place was in a very remote Part of the World, yet the Solitude of it perfectly suited his studious Disposition, and the Income arising from it bounded his Ambition. Here he would have been content to live and die; here, as he has often been heard to declare, he spent some of the happiest Hours of his Life; and it was no Thought or Choice of his own that removed him to a higher and more public Sphere. But Mrs.

SECKER's Health, which began now to be very bad, and was thought to have been injured by the Dampness of the Situation, obliged him to think of exchanging it for a more healthy one. And Dr. FINNEY, Prebendary of *Durham*, and Rector of *Ryton*, being old and infirm, Mr. BENSON requested the Bishop, through Dr. RUNDLE, that Mr. SECKER might succeed him, and resign *Houghton*. This meeting with Difficulties, Mr. BENSON, in order to remove them, very generously gave up his Prebend of *Sarum*, to accommodate the Person for whom *Ryton* was designed, and then Mr. SECKER was allowed to make the Exchange abovementioned. He went up to *London*, and was instituted to *Ryton* and the Prebend, *June 3, 1727*, and for the two following Years lived chiefly at *Durham*, going over every Week to officiate at *Ryton*, and spending there two or three Months together in the Summer.

In *July 1732*, the Duke of *Grafton*, then Lord Chamberlain, appointed him Chaplain to the King. For this Favour he was indebted to Dr. SHERLOCK, who having heard him preach at *Bath*, had conceived the highest Opinion of his Abilities, and thought them well worthy of being brought forwards into

public Notice. From that Time an Intimacy commenced betwixt them, and he received from that great Prelate many solid Proofs of Esteem and Friendship.

His Month of Waiting at *St. James's* happened to be *August*, and on *Sunday* the 27th of that Month he preached before the Queen, the King being then abroad. A few Days after, her Majesty sent for him into her Closet, and held a long and gracious Conversation with him. In the Course of it he took an Opportunity of mentioning to her his Friend Mr. BUTLER. The Queen said, she thought he had been dead. Mr. SECKER assured her he was not. Yet her Majesty afterwards asked Archbishop BLACKBURNE if he was not dead? His Answer was; No, Madam, but he is buried. And indeed the Retirement of *Stanhope*, where he spent almost his whole Time, was too solitary for his Disposition, which had in it a natural Cast of Gloominess. And though these recluse Hours were by no Means lost either to private Improvement or public Utility, yet he felt at Times, very painfully, the Want of that select Society of Friends, to which he had been accustomed, and which could inspire him with the greatest Chearfulness. Mr. SECKER, who knew this,

was

was extremely anxious to draw him out into a more active and conspicuous Scene, and omitted no Opportunity of expressing this Desire to such as he thought capable of promoting it. And not long after this, on Mr. TALBOT's being made Lord Chancellor, he found Means to have Mr. BUTLER recommended to him for his Chaplain. His Lordship accepted and sent for him. This Promotion bringing him back into the World, the Queen very soon appointed him her *Clerk of the Closet*, from whence he rose, as his Talents became more known, to those high Dignities which he afterwards enjoyed.

Mr. SECKER now began to have a public Character, and stood high in the Estimation of those who were allowed to be the best Judges of Merit. He had already given Proofs of Abilities that plainly indicated the Eminence to which he must one Day rise, as a Preacher and a Divine ; and it was not long before an Opportunity offered of placing him in an advantageous Point of View. Dr. TYRWHIT, who succeeded Dr. CLARKE as Rector of *St. James's* in 1729, found that preaching in so large a Church endangered his Health. Bishop GIBSON therefore, his Father-in-law, proposed to the Crown that he should be made

Residen-

Residentary of *St. Paul's*, and that Mr. SECKER should succeed him in the Rectory. This Arrangement was so acceptable to those in Power, that it took Place without any Difficulty. Mr. SECKER was instituted Rector the 18th of *May*, 1733, and in the Beginning of *July* went to *Oxford* to take his Degree of *Doctor of Laws*, not being of sufficient Standing for that of *Divinity*. On this Occasion it was that he preached his celebrated *Act Sermon* on the Advantages and the Duties of academical Education, which was universally allowed to be a Masterpiece of sound Reasoning and just Composition. It was printed at the Desire of the Heads of Houses, and quickly passed through several Editions. It is now to be found in the Second Collection of his *Occasional Sermons*, published by himself in 1766.

He was censured in a Paper called *The Weekly Miscellany* for not quoting Texts of Scripture in this Sermon. The only Notice he took of that Censure was by contributing very liberally for many Years towards supporting the Author of it.

At his next Waiting, at *Hampton-Court*, the Queen again sent for him, and said very obliging

ing Things to him of this Sermon. And it was thought that the Reputation he had acquired by it contributed not a little towards that Promotion which very soon followed its Publication. For in *December* 1734 he received a very unexpected Notice, by Letter, from Bishop GIBSON, that the King had fixed on him to be Bishop of *Bristol*. Dr. RUNDLE had a little before this been proposed by the Lord Chancellor TALBOT for the See of *Gloucester*, but on Account of some Imprudences of Speech charged on the Doctor by Mr. VENN, the Bishop of *London* opposed this Nomination, and with much Difficulty prevailed on Dr. BENSON to accept that Dignity. Dr. FLEMING was about the same Time promoted to the See of *Carlisle*; and the three new Bishops were all consecrated together in *Lambeth Chapel*, Jan. 19, 1734-5, the Consecration Sermon being preached by Dr. THOMAS, late Bishop of *Winchester*.

The Honours to which Dr. SECKER was thus raised in the Prime of Life did not in the least abate his Diligence and Attention to Business; for which indeed there was now more Occasion than ever. He immediately set about the Visitation of his Diocese, confirmed in a



great Number of Places, preached in several Churches, sometimes twice a Day, and, from the Informations received in his Progress, laid the Foundation of a parochial Account of his Diocese, for the Benefit of his Successors. Finding, at the same Time, the Affairs of his Parish of *St. James's* in great Disorder, he took the Trouble, in Concert with a few others, to put the Accounts of the several Officers into a regular Method, drew up a Set of excellent Rules to direct them better for the future, and, by the large Share which he always took in the Management of the Poor, and the Regulation of many other parochial Concerns, was of signal Service to his Parishioners, even in a temporal View. But it was their spiritual Welfare which engaged, as it ought to do, his chief Attention. As far as the Circumstances of the Times and the Populousness of that polite Part of the Metropolis allowed, he omitted not even those private Admonitions and personal Applications which are often attended with the happiest Effects. Not being able, however, to do so much in this Way as he wished, he was peculiarly assiduous in giving and promoting every Kind of public Instruction. He allowed out of his  
own

own Income a Salary for reading early and late Prayers, which had formerly been paid out of the Offertory Money. He held a *Confirmation* once every Year, and examined and instructed the Candidates several Weeks before in the Vestry, and gave them religious Tracts, which he also distributed, at other Times, very liberally to those that needed them. He drew up for the Use of his Parishioners that admirable Course of *Lectures on the Church Catechism*, which have been lately published, and not only read them, once every Week on the usual Days, but also every Sunday Evening, either at the Church or one of the Chapels belonging to it. They were received with universal Approbation, and attended regularly by Persons of all Ages and Conditions. The Judgement of the Public has since confirmed the Opinion of his Parishioners, and established the Reputation of this Work, as one of the fullest, clearest, and exactest Compendiums of revealed Religion that the English Language affords.

The Sermons which at the same Time he set himself to compose were truly excellent and original. His Faculties were now in their full Vigour, and he had an Audience to speak

before that rendered the utmost Exertion of them necessary. He did not however seek to gratify the higher Part by amusing them with refined Speculations or ingenious Essays, unintelligible to the lower Part, and unprofitable to both; but he laid before them all, with equal Freedom and Plainness, the great Christian Duties belonging to their respective Stations, and reproved the Follies and Vices of every Rank amongst them without Distinction or Palliation. He studied human Nature thoroughly in all its various Forms, and knew what Sort of Arguments would have most Weight with each Class of Men. He brought the Subject home to their Bosoms, and did not seem to be merely saying useful Things in their Presence, but addressing himself personally to every one of them. Few ever possessed, in a higher Degree, the rare Talent of touching on the most delicate Subjects with the nicest Propriety and Decorum, of saying the most familiar Things without being low, the plainest without being feeble, the boldest without giving Offence. He could descend with such singular Ease and Felicity into the minutest Concerns of common Life, could lay open, with so much Address, the various Workings,

Workings, Artifices, and Evasions of the human Mind; that his Audience often thought their own particular Cases alluded to, and heard with Surprize their private Sentiments and Feelings, their Ways of reasoning and Principles of acting, exactly stated and described. His Preaching was, at the same Time, highly rational, and truly evangelical. He explained with Perspicuity, he asserted with Dignity, the peculiar characteristic Doctrines of the Gospel. He inculcated the Utility, the Necessity of them, not merely as speculative Truths, but as actual Instruments of moral Goodness, tending to purify the Hearts, and regulate the Lives of Men; and thus, by God's gracious Appointment, as well as by the inseparable Connection betwixt true Faith and right Practice, leading them to Salvation.

These important Truths he taught with the Authority, the Tenderness, the Familiarity, of a Parent instructing his Children. Though he neither possessed nor affected the artificial Eloquence of an Orator who wants only to amuse or to mislead, yet he had that of an honest Man who wants to convince, of a Christian Preacher who wants to reform and to save, those that hear him. Solid

Argument, manly Sense, useful Directions, short, nervous, striking Sentences, awakening Questions, frequent and pertinent Applications of Scripture; all these following each other in quick Succession, and coming evidently from the Speaker's Heart; enforced by his Elocution, his Figure, his Action, and above all by the corresponding Sanctity of his Example, stamped Conviction on the Minds of his Hearers, and sent them Home with Impressions not easy to be effaced. It will readily be imagined that with these Powers he quickly became one of the most admired and popular Preachers of his Time. And though it is not to be expected that his Sermons will now afford the same Pleasure, or produce the same Effects, in the Closet, that they did from the Pulpit, accompanied as they then were with all the Advantages of his Delivery; yet it will plainly appear, that the Applause they met with was founded no less on the Matter they contained, than the Manner in which they were spoken.

On the Death of Archbishop WAKE, Dr. POTTER was appointed to succeed him in the See of *Canterbury*, and that of *Oxford* was offered to Dr. SECKER, who at first declined it. But at the earnest Request of Bishop  
SHERLOCK,

SHERLOCK, who was desirous to obtain the Bishopric of *Bristol* for his Brother-in-law Dr. GOOCH, he was at Length prevailed on to accept the Proposal, and was confirmed Bishop of *Oxford* in the Month of *May* 1737. Towards the End of the same Year died Queen CAROLINE, and the *Sunday* following Bishop SECKER preached a Sermon on that Occasion, at *St. James's* Church, which the Princesses desired to see, and showed it to the King, who read it. It was afterwards published in the Second Volume of his *Occasional Sermons*, which appeared in his Life-time.

When the unfortunate Breach happened betwixt the late King and the Prince of *Wales*, his Royal Highness having removed to *Norfolk-House*, which is in the Parish of *St. James's*, attended Divine Service constantly in that Church. The first Time he came there, the Clerk in Orders, Mr. BONNEY, inadvertently begun Prayers with his usual sentence of Scripture, *I will arise and go to my Father, &c.* This quickly became the Subject of much Conversation; and an Addition was made to it, that the Rector preached on the Fifth Commandment, *Honour thy Father and thy Mother, &c.* which was so positively asserted, that Bishop SHERLOCK could only

defend him, by saying that he must certainly have been in a Course of Sermons on the Commandments, and therefore could not help preaching upon that particular one in its Turn. But the Truth was, he preached on a quite different Text, *The Lord is good to all*, &c. and the whole Sermon was on that Subject. The Prince was pleased to shew his Lordship several Marks of Civility and Condescension. He had the Honour of baptizing all his Highness's Children, except two; and though he did not attend his Court, which was forbidden to all those who went to the King's, yet on every proper Occasion he behaved with all the Submission and Respect due to his illustrious Rank. In Consequence of this, his Influence with the Prince being supposed much greater than it really was, he was sent, by the King's Direction, with a Message to his Royal Highness; which not producing the Effects expected from it, he had the Misfortune to incur his Majesty's Displeasure; who had been unhappily persuaded to think that he might have done more with the Prince than he did, though indeed he could not.—For this Reason, and because he sometimes acted with those who opposed the Court, the King did not speak to him for a great Number of Years.

In.

In *February* 1742-3 a Bill was brought into Parliament to take off the high Duties on spirituous Liquors, and to lay on others much lower in their Room. As this Alteration was thought likely to have a most pernicious Effect on the Health and Morals of the common People, it met with a vigorous Opposition in the House of Lords, especially from the Bench of Bishops, all of whom voted, and several spoke, against it. Amongst the latter were Bishop SHERLOCK and Bishop SECKER: And when it passed, the Bishop of *Oxford* entered his Dissent. Mr. SANDYS was then Chancellor of the Exchequer, and this was considered as his Bill; yet soon after, on the Death of Bishop HOUGH, he very generously endeavoured, without Dr. SECKER's Knowledge, to obtain for him the See of *Worcester*. It was in the Course of the same Year that his Lordship received a Letter from Dr. WISHART, Provost of *Edinburgh* College, recommending to him his Brother and Mr. WALLACE, Deputies from the established Clergy of *Scotland*, to promote a Bill in Parliament for providing a Maintenance for their Widows and Children, which many of them imagined the Bishops would oppose. Dr. SECKER paid them all the Civility, and did  
them



them all the Service he could. None of the Bench opposed their Bill either publicly or privately, and it was moved for by a Bishop at each of its three Readings in the House of Lords.

About the Middle of *October*, in the following Year, died SARAH, Duchess Dowager of *Marlborough*. She was buried at *Blenheim*, by Bishop SECKER, whom she had appointed one of her Executors. For this Choice she could have no other Reason than the high Opinion she entertained in common with the rest of the World, of his Understanding and Integrity; for he never paid the least Court to her, either by private Adulation, or by accommodating his public Conduct to her Grace's political Sentiments. On his being made Bishop of OXFORD, she paid him some common Civilities of Neighbourhood, and desired, by Lord CORNEURY, to see him. When he had visited her a few Times, she requested him to be one of her Executors, and read to him the Clause in her Will relating to them, in which she had given each of them £:2000, and indemnified them from any Mistakes which they might honestly make. Before he gave his Consent, he consulted Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE upon it, who ad-  
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vised him to accept the Trust. After this he visited her Grace occasionally every Winter. She never asked him any Questions, nor gave him any Hints, about the past or future Disposal of his Vote in Parliament. He always spoke his Mind to her very freely, how much soever it differed from hers, and she bore it, for the most Part, patiently. He blamed her for leaving so much of her Estate to Persons not related to her, and particularly for giving any Thing to himself, who, he told her, was as rich as her Grace. These Remonstrances she did not seem to take well, and never said any Thing more to him about her Will. He therefore concluded that she had struck him out from being one of her Executors, but it proved otherwise. She gave each of them an additional £.500. None of her Money ever came into his Lordship's Hands to be disposed of by him in her Life-time. But he had good Reason to think that she gave away large Sums in Charity, to the amount of several Thousands every Year.

Some Time before this, the Nation began to be alarmed with the Appearances of a Rebellion. About the middle of *February*, 1743-4, the King sent a Message to both Houses of Parliament, acquainting them, that  
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the Pretender's Son was meditating an Invasion of this Kingdom from the Coast of *France*. The Bishop of OXFORD took the earliest Opportunity, after this Declaration, of signalizing his Affection to the Government, and exciting that of others, by composing a Sermon on the Occasion, which he preached at *St. James's Church* the 26th of the same Month. A Motion was soon after made in the House of Lords to attain the Pretender's Son. It met with some Opposition, but was strenuously supported by the Friends of the Constitution, and amongst others by Bishop SECKER, who made a spirited extempore Speech in its Favour. When the Rebellion actually broke out in *September*, 1745, he sent immediately a circular Letter upon it to his Clergy, and drew up and promoted an Address from them to the King. On his Return to *London* in *October*, he preached the above-mentioned Sermon again at his Church and both his Chapels, with some Alterations and Improvements, and leaving it to be printed, went down to a County Meeting at *Oxford*, and back again in a few Days to *St. James's*, when he presented his Sermon to the King. It was much read and admired, and has been ranked, by

the best Judges, amongst the First of the many excellent Ones which were published on that Occasion \*.

In the Spring of the Year 1748, Mrs. SECKER died of the Gout in her Stomach. She was a Woman of great Sense and Merit, but of a very weak and sickly Constitution. They had been married upwards of twenty Years, during the greatest Part of which Time, her extreme bad State of Health and Spirits had put his Affection to the severest Trials; by which, instead of being lessened, it seemed to become stronger every Day. He attended her in all her long Illnesses with the greatest Care and Tenderness, and was always ready to break off any Engagement, any Study, provided his Company could procure her a Moment's Ease or Chearfulness.

Not long after this a Bill came into the House of Lords, and afterwards passed into an Act, by which all Letters of Orders to *Scotch* Episcopal Ministers, not granted by a Bishop of the Church of *England* or *Ireland*, were disallowed from *Michaelmas*, 1748, whether dated before that Time or after. This the Bishop of *Oxford* thought a great Hard-

\* It is now in the Volume of Sermons printed by himself when Bishop of Oxford, in 1758.

ship, and spoke largely against it in the House. He was answered, but with much Civility and Respect, by Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE, who favoured the Bill. In the Committee however the Majority were against it, of which all the Bishops present made Part. Bishop THOMAS, of *Lincoln*, also spoke against it upon the Report. But there they were outvoted. Dr. WISHART, the Provost of *Edinburgh* College, told his Lordship afterwards, that he thought the Bill was too hard on the Episcopal Ministers, and that the Bishops had done right.

The Part which Dr. SECKER took in this Affair did him not the least Disservice with his Friend the Lord Chancellor, whose Sentiments he opposed; and who a little before had made a Proposal to him, that if the Deanery of *St. Paul's* became vacant, he should take it in Exchange for the Rectory of *St. James's*, and the Prebend of *Durham*. The Bishop accepted the Offer; but told his Lordship he should not remind him of it, which he never did. Notwithstanding that, about two Years afterwards, on the Nomination of Dr. BUTLER, Dean of *St. Paul's*, to the See of *Durham*, Lord HARDWICKE immediately wrote to the Duke of *Newcastle*, who was then at

*Hanover*

*Hanover* with the King, recommending the Bishop of *Oxford* for the Deanery. His Majesty consented, and he was installed in *December, 1750.*

It was no Wonder that after presiding over so extensive and populous a Parish for upwards of Seventeen Years, Bishop SECKER should willingly consent to be released from a Burthen, which began now to grow too great for his Strength. Some of his Parishioners too had requited him but ill for the Pains he sincerely took to serve them in all Respects. But far the largest and most creditable Part of them were duly sensible of what they owed to him; and most deeply regretted the Loss of a Pastor, whose Character they revered, and by whose Labours and Instructions they had so greatly profited. When he preached his Farewell Sermon, the whole Audience melted into Tears. He was followed with the Prayers and good Wishes of those whom every honest Man would be most ambitious to please; and there are Numbers still living, who retain a strong and grateful Remembrance of his incessant and tender Solitude for their Welfare.

Having now more Leisure both to prosecute his own Studies, and to encourage those of others,

others, he gave Dr. CHURCH considerable Assistance, in his *first and second Vindication of the miraculous Powers, &c.* against Dr. MIDDLETON, which were published in the Years 1750 and 1751; and he was of equal Use to him in his *Analysis of Lord BOLINGBROKE's Works*, which appeared a few Years afterwards. About the same Time began the late Archdeacon SHARP's Controversy with the Followers of Mr. HUTCHINSON, which was carried on to the End of the Year 1755. The Subjects of it were, the Meaning of the Words *Elohim* and *Berith*, the Antiquity of the *Hebrew* Language and Character, the Exposition of the Word *Cherubim*. These Pieces made together three Volumes in Octavo. Bishop SECKER read over all Dr. SHARP's Papers before they went to the Press, and corrected and improved them throughout.

But the Ease which this late Change of Situation gave him was very soon disturbed by a heavy and unexpected Stroke, the Loss of his three Friends, Bishops BUTLER, BENSON, and BERKELEY, who were all cut off within the Space of one Year. Of these eminent Men who were thus joined in Death, as they had been throughout Life, and with whom Bishop SECKER was most intimately connected from  
his

his earliest Years, two are so well known to the World by their immortal Writings, and the just Applause of contemporary Authors, that they need no other Memorial. But the Name of BENSON, being written only on the Hearts of those that knew him, deserves some further Notice in this Place.

\* He was educated at the *Charter-house*, and removed from thence to *Christ Church* in *Oxford*, where he had several noble Pupils, whose Friendship and Veneration for him continued to the End of Life. His favourite Study in early Years was the *Mathematics*, in which he was well skilled, and had also an excellent Taste for *Painting*, *Architeclure*, and the other fine Arts. He accompanied the late Earl of POMFRET in his Travels, and in *Italy* became acquainted with Mr. BERKELEY, as he did at *Paris* with Mr. SECKER. He was, from his Youth to his latest Age, the Delight of all who knew him. His Manner and Behaviour were the Result of great natural Humanity, polished by a thorough Knowledge of the World, and the most perfect good Breeding, mixed with a Dignity, which, on Occasions that called for it, no one

\* This Account of Bishop BENSON is given in the Words of a Person who knew him well, and to whom this Narrative is indebted for a few other Communications of the same Nature.



more properly supported. His Piety, though awefully strict, was inexpressibly amiable. It diffused such a Sweetness through his Temper, and such a Benevolence over his Countenance, as none who were acquainted with him can ever forget. Bad Nerves, bad Health, and naturally bad Spirits were so totally subdued by it, that he not only seemed, but in Reality was, the happiest of Men. He looked upon all that the World calls important, its Pleasures, its Riches, its various Competitions, with a playful and good-humoured Kind of Contempt; and could make Persons ashamed of their Follies, by a Raillery that never gave Pain to any human Being. Of Vice he always spoke with Severity and Detestation, but looked on the vicious with the Tenderness of a pitying Angel. His Turn was highly sociable, and his Acquaintance very extensive. Wherever he went, he carried Chearfulness and Improvement along with him. As Nothing but the Interests of Christianity and Virtue seemed considerable enough to give him any lasting Anxiety; so, on the other Hand, there was no Incident so trifling from which he could not raise Amusement and Mirth.

It was much against his Will that he was appointed Bishop of *Gloucester*, and from **that**

**See**

See he would never remove. He was however a vigilant and active Prelate. He revived the very useful Institution of rural Deans, he augmented several Livings, he beautified the Church, and greatly improved the Palace. It was an Act of Kindness to his Friend which cost him his Life. At the Request of Dr. SECKER he went from *Gloucester* to *Bath* to visit Bishop BUTLER, who lay ill at that Place, and he found him almost at the Point of Death. After one Day's Stay there, he was obliged to go to the northern Extremity of his Diocese, to confirm. The Fatigue of these Journies, (for, according to his constant Practice, he travelled on Horseback) and his Business together, produced an Inflammation, and that a Mortification, in his Bowels, of which he died. The Bishop of *Oxford* was appointed one of his Executors, with a Legacy of £.300. which he refused to take.

In the Beginning of the Year 1753, a Bill for the Naturalization of the *Jews*, commonly called the *Jew Bill*, had passed both Houses of Parliament with little or no Opposition, But a great Clamour being raised against it without Doors, it was thought advisable that

the Duke of *Newcastle* should move for the Repeal of it, on the first Day of the Session in the next Winter. And he desiring to be seconded by a Bishop, Dr. SECKER was fixed on for that Purpose. He accordingly rose up after the Duke, and made a Speech, which had the good Fortune to be remarkably well received; though Lord *Westmoreland* said, that for some Time he thought the Bishop had been speaking against the Repeal, having advanced more in Favour of the Bill than he had ever heard before. He spoke afterwards for a Clause to disable *Jews* from being Patrons of Livings, which some thought they might; but the Desire of the House for the simple Repeal prevailed, and he was advised not to divide it on the Clause. On this Occasion it was that he vindicated his Friend Dr. SHERLOCK, with great Spirit, against some severe Attacks made upon him by a noble Lord in Relation to this Bill; for which generous Proceeding he had the Bishop's Thanks.

During the whole Time that he was Dean of *St. Paul's*, he attended Divine Service constantly in that Cathedral twice every Day, whether in Residence or not; and, in Concert with the other three Residentiaries, established the Cus-

tom of always preaching their own Turns in the Afternoon, or exchanging with each other only ; which, excepting the Case of Illness, or extraordinary Accidents, was very punctually observed. The Fund, appropriated to the Repairs of the Church, having by Neglect and wrong Management fallen into much Confusion, he took great Pains in examining the Accounts, reducing Payments, making a proper Division of Expence betwixt the Dean and Chapter on one Side, and the three Trustees on the other, and prevailing on the latter to agree to that Division ; by which Means the Fund was put on such a Footing, that it encreased afterwards considerably, and promised to be sufficient for the Purposes it was designed to answer. In the following Year he was engaged in another very troublesome Transaction, making an Agreement with the Inhabitants of *St. Faith's* Parish, concerning their Share of *St. Paul's* Church-yard. And he left behind him a great Number of Papers relative to both these Points. He procured the old Writings of the Church to be put in Order, and an Index made to them. He collated a Copy of the old Statute-Book, as it is called, with that which is used as the Original, and corrected a Multitude of Mistakes in that

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Transcript.

Transcript. He examined also the Registers and Books in the Chapter-House, extracted out of them what seemed material, and left the Extracts in the Hands of his Successor.

In the Summer Months he resided constantly at his Episcopal House at *Cuddesden*. The Vicinity of that Place to the University of *Oxford*, and the natural Connection which his Station gave him with the Members of that learned Body, could not but be very pleasing to a Man of his literary Turn. Yet his Situation, agreeable and honourable as it was to him, had notwithstanding its Difficulties. To appear with any considerable Degree of Credit amongst so many Men of the first Eminence for Genius and Erudition, and to preserve the Reverence due to the Character of a Diocesan, amidst such violent Party-dissensions as at that Time unhappily prevailed there, required no small Share of Ability and Prudence. Dr. SECKER however had the good Fortune to succeed in both those Points. His House was the Resort of those who were most distinguished for academical Merit, and his Conversation such as was worthy of his Guests, who always left him with a high Esteem of his Understanding and Learning. And though in the warm Contest in 1754,  
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for Representatives of the County, (in which it was scarce possible for any Person of Eminence to remain neuter) he openly espoused that Side which was thought most favourable to the Principles of the Revolution ; yet it was without Bitterness or Vehemence, without ever departing from the Decency of his Profession, the Dignity of his Station, or the Charity prescribed by his Religion. On the contrary, along with the truest Affection to the Government, (though he was then under the Displeasure of the Court) he preserved at the same Time so much good Temper and good Will towards the opposite Party ; took such unwearied Pains to soften the violent Prejudices conceived against them by the Administration ; and shewed on all proper Occasions so cordial and friendly a Concern for the Welfare and Honour of the whole University ; that they, who most disliked his political Tenets, could not help acknowledging his Candour and Moderation. The same prudent Conduct in this Respect which he observed himself, he recommended to his Clergy in that memorable Passage towards the Conclusion of his fifth Charge,\* which struck the Hearers by its Novelty and Propriety at the Time in a very

\* Page 197.

remarkable Manner, and is well worthy the serious Perusal of all who happen to be in similar Circumstances. Indeed the whole Series of those excellent Charges, which he delivered in the Course of his governing that Diocese, were listened to by a very learned and critical Audience with peculiar Marks of Attention and Regard. The first of them, which contains Directions for regulating the Studies, the Temper, and general Conduct of the Clergy, was printed soon after it was spoken, and passed through several Editions. Having in this considered them as Ministers of the Gospel at large, in his subsequent ones he proceeded to consider them as Ministers of the several Parishes in which they officiated; and descended to more particular Directions, both with Regard to the Discharge of their spiritual Functions, and also the Care of their Temporalities, their Incomes, Churches, Lands, and Houses.

But Words were not the only Persuasives he made use of. He enjoined no Duty, he imposed no Burthen on those under his Jurisdiction, which he had not formerly undergone, or was not still ready, as far as it became him, to undergo. He preached constantly in his Church at *Cuddestden* every *Sunday*

day Morning, and read a Lecture on the Catechism in the Evening; (both which he continued to do in *Lambeth* Chapel after he became Archbishop;) and in every other Respect, within his own proper Department, was himself that devout, discreet, disinterested, laborious, conscientious Pastor, which he wished and exhorted every Clergyman in his Diocese to become.

A Conduct like this could not fail of attracting the Notice and Esteem of all those who wished well to the Cause of Learning and Religion, in whose Thoughts he had been long marked out for the highest Honours of his Profession. He continued notwithstanding in the See of *Oxford* upwards of twenty Years; going on that whole Time in the same even Course of Duty, and enjoying with the highest Relish those leisure Hours, which his Retirement at *Cuddesden* sometimes afforded him, for the Prosecution of his favourite Studies. At Length however his distinguished Merit prevailed over all the political Obstacles to his Advancement; and placed him, without any Effort or Application of his own, in that important Station which he had shewn himself so well qualified to adorn. For within a very  
few



few Days after the Death of Archbishop HUTTON, he received a Message from the Duke of Newcastle, acquainting him that his Grace had proposed him to the King for the vacant See of *Canterbury*. He returned the Duke a short Note of Thanks, expressing at the same Time his Wishes that his Majesty might fix on a properer Person. Soon after this his Grace desired an Interview with the Bishop, at which he informed his Lordship that the King had appointed him Archbishop. This Promotion accordingly took Place, and he was confirmed at *Bow-Church*, *April 21, 1758*.

In accepting this high and burthensome Station Dr. SECKER acted on that Principle which influenced him through Life; he sacrificed his own Ease and Comfort to Considerations of public Utility. Apart from this, the mere secular Advantages of Grandeur were Objects below his Ambition; were, as he knew and felt, but poor Compensations for the Anxiety and Difficulties attending them. His Idea of these Things was always the same with that which is expressed in his intended Speech to the Convocation of 1761; “Non  
 “ sunt, experto credite, non sunt tanti vel ho-  
 “ nores vel redditus amplissimi Ecclesiasticis  
 “ destinati, ut a quopiam enixè cupiantur.  
 “ Multum

“ Multum habent sollicitudinis, non parum  
“ forsan invidiæ, veræ delectationis nihil, nisi  
“ quoties occurrit, occurrit autem raro, infig-  
“ nis benefaciendi occasio \*.” These were  
not mere Words of Course ; they were the  
genuine Sentiments of his Heart ; his whole  
Conduct bore Testimony to the Sincerity with  
which he spoke. He had never once through  
his whole Life asked Preferment for himself,  
nor shewn any unbecoming Eagerness for it ;  
and the Use he made of his newly acquired  
Dignity very clearly shewed, that Rank, and  
Wealth, and Power had in no other Light  
any Charms for him, than as they enlarged  
the Sphere of his active and industrious Bene-  
volence.

The first Thing that engaged his Attention  
was the Care of his new Diocese, which he  
immediately visited. And finding that partly  
the real, and partly the presumed, Unwhole-  
someness of some Parts of it had deterred too  
many from living on their Benefices, he made  
this the first Article of his Charge, and pressed  
the Necessity of Residence upon his Clergy, in  
the strongest, yet most affectionate Terms†.

\* *Oratio Synodalis*, p. 368, 369.

† First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*, p. 207—219.

But whenever particular Circumstances rendered the personal Presence of the Minister himself clearly impracticable, he then earnestly recommended peculiar Care in the Choice of a Substitute; and so much Tendernefs and Liberality in the Provision made for him as might be some Compensation for the Unhealthiness or Disagreeableness of his Situation.\* Yet as this would, he knew, bear hard on some Incumbents, whose small Preferments, or narrow Circumstances, or numerous Families obliged them to obtain Help on as easy Terms as they well could; in such Cases he frequently made an Addition himself to the Curate's Salary, and as a still further Encouragement, rewarded occasionally with Preferment, those who had resided long upon their Cures, and performed their Duty well; especially in unwholesome Places.

In little more than two Years after his Grace's Promotion to the See of *Canterbury*, died the late King GEORGE the Second. Of what passed on that Occasion, and of the Form observed in proclaiming our present most gracious Sovereign, (in which the Arch-

\* First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*. p. 219—222.

bishop of Course took the Lead) his Grace has left an Account in Writing. He did the same with regard to the subsequent Ceremonials of marrying and crowning their present Majesties, which in Consequence of his Station he had the Honour to solemnize, and in which he found a great Want of proper Precedents and Directions. He had before, when Rector of *St. James's*, baptized the new King, (who was born in that Parish) and he was afterwards called upon to perform the same Office for the greatest Part of his Majesty's Children;—a remarkable, and perhaps unexampled, Concurrence of such Incidents in the Life of one Man.

From the Time that he was made Dean of *St. Paul's*, his late Majesty used to speak to him at his Levee occasionally, but with no particular Marks of Distinction. But after he became Archbishop, the King treated him with much Kindness, and on one Occasion was pleased to assure him very particularly, that he was perfectly satisfied with the Whole of his Conduct in that Station. And surely his Majesty, as well as all his People, <sup>had</sup> ~~has~~ good Reason to be so. For never did any one support the Rank, or discharge the various Duties, of a Metropolitan, with more true Dignity, Wisdom, and

and Moderation, than Archbishop SECKER\*. He considered himself as the natural Guardian, not only of that Church, over which he presided, but of Learning, Virtue, and Religion at large; and, from the Eminence on which he was placed, looked round with a watchful Eye on every Thing that concerned them, embracing readily all fit Opportunities to promote their Interests, and opposing, as far as he was able, all Attempts to injure them.

Men of real Genius or extensive Knowledge, he sought out and encouraged. Even those of humbler Talents, provided their Industry was great, and their Intentions good, he treated with Kindness and Condescension. Both Sorts he would frequently employ in Undertakings suited to their respective Abilities, and rewarded them in Ways suited to their respective Wants. He assisted them with Books, promoted Sub-

\* *Ecquâ vero in parte spem nostram fefellit? imo vero exsuperavit. Sine offensione partium, sine invidiâ, sine ambitione, ecclesiæ principatum adeptus, sine arrogantia cum dignitate verè sustinuit; magni vir animi, & verè ἀρχιεπίσκοπος, qui politiam ecclesiasticam animo complectebatur, consilio dirigebat, auctoritate tuebatur, exemplo ornabat; in negotiis impiger & indefessus, nihil a se alienum putabat quod ad clericorum jura, mores, famamque pertinebat; auctoritate ita usus ut nihil pro libidine aut insolentia imperii affectaret, sed omnia ad οἰκονομίαν communisque ecclesiæ utilitates referret. Johannis Burton ad amicum epistola, p. 14. Printed at Oxford, in 1768, and sold by RIVINGTON.*

scriptions to their Works, contributed largely to them himself, talked with them on their private Concerns, entered warmly into their Interests, used his Credit for them with the Great, gave them Preferments of his own. He expended upwards of £.300, in arranging and improving the Manuscript Library at *Lambeth*. And having observed with Concern, that the Library of printed Books in that Palace had received no Accessions since the Time of Archbishop TENNISON, he made it his Business to collect Books in all Languages from most Parts of *Europe* at a very great Expence, with a View of supplying that Chasm; which he accordingly did, by leaving them to the Library at his Death, and thereby rendered that Collection one of the noblest and most useful in the Kingdom.

All Designs and Institutions that tended to advance good Morals and true Religion he patronized with Zeal and Generosity. He contributed largely to the Maintenance of Schools for the Poor, to rebuilding or repairing Parsonage Houses and Places of Worship, and gave at one Time no less than £.500 towards erecting a Chapel in the Parish of *Lambeth*, to which he afterwards added near £.100 more. To the Society for promoting Christian

tian Knowledge he was a liberal Benefactor ; and to that for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts, of which he was the President, he paid much Attention ; was constant at all the Meetings of its Members, (even sometimes when his Health would but ill permit it) and superintended their Deliberations with consummate Prudence and Temper. He was sincerely desirous to improve to the utmost that excellent Institution, and to diffuse the Knowledge and Belief of Christianity as wide as the Revenues of the Society, and the extreme Difficulty of establishing Schools and Missions amongst the *Indians*, and of making any effectual and durable Impressions of Religion on their uncivilized Minds, would admit. But Dr. MAYHEW, of *Boston* in *New-England*, having in an angry Pamphlet accused the Society of not sufficiently answering these good Purposes, and of departing widely from the Spirit of their Charter ; with many injurious Reflections interspersed on the Church of *England*, and the Design of appointing Bishops in *America* ; his Grace on all these Accounts thought himself called upon to confute his Invectives, which he did in a short anonymous Piece, entitled, *An Answer to Dr. MAYHEW's*

*Observations on the Charter and Conduct of the Society for propagating the Gospel*; printed for RIVINGTON in 1764, and reprinted in *America*. The Strength of Argument, as well as Fairness and good Temper, with which this Answer was written, had a considerable Effect on all impartial Men, and even on the Doctor himself, who plainly perceived that he had no common Adversary to deal with; and could not help acknowledging him to be “ a Person  
“ of excellent Sense, and a happy Talent at  
“ writing; apparently free from the sordid  
“ illiberal Spirit of Bigotry; one of a cool  
“ Temper, who often shewed much Candour,  
“ was well acquainted with the Affairs of the  
“ Society, and in general a fair Reasoner \*.” He was therefore so far wrought upon by his “ worthy Answerer †,” as to abate much in his Reply of his former Warmth and Acrimony. But as he still would not allow himself to be “ wrong in any material Point ‡,” nor forbear giving Way too much to reproachful Language and ludicrous Representations, he was again animadverted upon by Mr. APTHORPE, in a sensible Tract, entitled, *A Review of Dr.*

\* MAYHEW's Remarks on an anonymous Tract, &c. P. 3.  
† Ibid. P. 85.      ‡ Ibid. P. 87.



MAYHEW's *Remarks*, &c. printed also for RIVINGTON, in 1765. This put an End to the Dispute. The Doctor on reading it declared he should not answer it, and the following Year he died.

It appeared evidently in the Course of this Controversy, that Dr. MAYHEW, and probably many other worthy Men amongst the *Dissenters* both at home and abroad, had conceived very unreasonable and groundless Jealousies of the Church of *England*, and its Governors; and had in particular greatly misunderstood the Proposal for appointing Bishops in some of the Colonies. The chief Reasons for desiring an Establishment of this Nature, were, the Want of Persons vested with proper Authority, to administer to the Members of the Church of *England* the antient and useful Office of Confirmation; to superintend the Conduct of the episcopal Clergy; and to save Candidates for the Ministry the Trouble, Cost, and Hazard of coming to *England* for Ordination. It was alledged, that the Expence of crossing the *Atlantic* for that Purpose could not be less than £.100. that near a fifth Part of those who took that Voyage had actually lost their Lives; and that, in Consequence of these

these Discouragements, one Half of the Churches in several Provinces were destitute of Clergymen. Common Humanity, as well as common Justice, pleaded strongly for a Remedy to these Evils; and there appeared to be no other effectual Remedy but the Appointment of one or more Bishops in some of the episcopal Colonies. The Dangers and Inconveniences, which the *Dissenters* seemed to apprehend from that Measure, were thought to be effectually guarded against by the Mode of Appointment which was proposed. What that Mode was, may be seen in the following Extract from the Archbishop's Answer to Dr. MAYNEW, in which he explains concisely and clearly the only Plan for such an Establishment that was ever meant to be carried into Execution.

“ The Church of *England* is, in its Con-  
“ stitution, episcopal. It is, in some of the  
“ Plantations, confessedly the established  
“ Church: in the rest are many Congrega-  
“ tions adhering to it; and through the late  
“ Extension of the *British* Dominions, it is  
“ likely that there will be more. All Mem-  
“ bers of every Church are, according to the  
“ Principles of Liberty, entitled to every Part  
“ of what they conceive to be the Benefits

“ of it, entire and complete, so far as consists  
 “ with the Welfare of civil Government.  
 “ Yet the Members of our Church in *America*  
 “ do not thus enjoy its Benefits, having no  
 “ Protestant Bishop within three thousand  
 “ Miles of them; a Case which never had  
 “ its Parallel before in the Christian World.  
 “ Therefore it is desired that two or more  
 “ Bishops may be appointed for them, to reside  
 “ where his Majesty shall think most convenient;  
 “ that they may have no Concern in  
 “ the least with any Persons who do not profess  
 “ themselves to be of the Church of  
 “ *England*, but may ordain Ministers for such  
 “ as do; may confirm their Children when  
 “ brought to them at a fit Age for that Purpose;  
 “ and take such Oversight of the episcopal  
 “ Clergy, as the Bishop of *London*’s  
 “ Commissaries in those Parts have been empowered  
 “ to take, and have taken without Offence. But it is  
 “ not desired in the least that they should hold  
 “ Courts to try matrimonial or testamentary Causes;  
 “ or be vested with any Authority now exercised,  
 “ either by provincial Governors, or subordinate  
 “ Magistrates; or infringe or diminish any  
 “ Privileges and Liberties, enjoyed by any of  
 “ the Laity, even of our own Communion.  
 “ This

“ This is the real and the only Scheme that  
 “ hath been planned for Bishops in *America* ;  
 “ and whoever hath heard of any other, hath  
 “ been misinformed through Mistake or De-  
 “ sign \*.” And as to the Place of their Re-  
 sidence, his Grace further declares, “ that it  
 “ neither is, nor ever was intended or desired  
 “ to fix one in *New-England* ; but episcopal  
 “ Colonies have always been proposed †.”

The Doctor on reading this Account con-  
 fessed ‡, that if it were the true one, “ he had  
 “ been misinformed himself, and knew of  
 “ others who had been so in common with  
 “ him ; and that if such a Scheme as this  
 “ were carried into Execution, and only such  
 “ Consequences were to follow, as the Pro-  
 “ poser had professedly in View, he could not  
 “ object against it, except on the same Prin-  
 “ ciple that he should object against the  
 “ Church of *England* in general §.”

As it came however from an unknown  
 Writer, he thought himself at Liberty to con-  
 sider it as Nothing more than the imaginary  
 Scheme of a private Man, till it was con-  
 firmed by better Authority ||. It now appears  
 to have come from the best Authority, and it

\* Answer to MAYHEW, P. 59.      † Ib. 66.      ‡ *Remarks*  
*on an anonymous Treatise*, &c. P. 59.      § Ib. P. 79.      || Ib. P. 61.

is certain that this Mode of establishing Bishops in *America*, was not invented merely “ to serve a present Turn \*, being precisely the same with that proposed by Bishop BUTLER twenty Years ago † ; and with that mentioned by his Grace, in his *Letter to the Right Honourable HORATIO WALPOLE*, Esquire, written when he was Bishop of *Oxford*, and published since his Death ‡ by his Executors, Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT, and Dr. DANIEL BURTON ; in which the whole Affair is set in a right Point of View, his own Sentiments upon it more fully explained, and an Answer given to the chief Objections against such a Proposal.

It is not necessary to enter here into the Merits of this Question. It is before the Public, and every one is enabled to judge for himself. But thus much, it is presumed, may safely be inferred from the Account here given of it ; (which is the true one ; ) that the mere Proposal of such an Appointment, or rather the Encouragement of what had been long before proposed, is not a Crime of quite so unpardonable a Nature, as the Archbishop’s

\* *Remarks on an anonymous Treatise*, &c. P. 61.

† See APTHORPE’s *Review of Dr. MAYHEW’s Remarks*, P. 55.

‡ In the Year 1769; and sold by RIVINGTON.

Adversaries have been pleased to represent it. Posterity will stand amazed, when they are told, that on this Account his Memory has been pursued in Pamphlets and News-papers with such unrelenting Rancour, such unexampled Wantonness of Abuse, as he would scarce have deserved, had he attempted to eradicate *Christianity* out of *America*, and to introduce *Mahometanism* in its Room : whereas, the plain Truth is, that all he wished for, was Nothing more than what the very best Friends to religious Freedom ever have wished for, a complete Toleration for the Church of *England* in that Country. What an Idea must it give Mankind of his Grace's Character to have such a Circumstance singled out by his bitterest Revilers as the most exceptionable Part of it !

But though the Archbishop was a sincere and avowed Friend to that Measure, yet it was by no Means the only or the principal Object of his Concern in Regard to the Colonies. . The Advancement of true Piety and Learning, the Conversion of the *Indians* and *Negrees*, as far as it was practicable, the Establishment of proper Schools, the Distribution of useful Books, the good Conduct of the Missionaries, the Preservation of Peace and Harmony amongst the different religious

Communities in those Parts of the *British* Empire ; these Things had a very large Share in his Thoughts, and in the Correspondence which he constantly kept up with a few of the ablest and worthiest Men in the *American* Provinces. The Letters which he wrote to them, on these and such like Subjects, are highly expressive of his pastoral Character ; and represent in a very pleasing Light his truly benevolent Disposition, his Condescension to Persons of the lowest Station, his indefatigable Application to every Affair that came before him, his Zeal to promote the Interests of Religion in general, and the Church of *England* in particular ; not by warm and violent Counsels, but by Methods of Tenderness and brotherly Kindness towards those who embraced a different Interest. Of these Things the *Americans* will ever retain a grateful Remembrance ; and have, in their Letters to this Country, expressed their Sense of his kind Attention to them in the strongest and most affectionate Terms.

Whenever any Publications came to his Knowledge that were manifestly calculated to corrupt good Morals, or subvert the Foundations of Christianity, he did his utmost to stop the Circulation of them : yet the wretched

Authors

Authors themselves he was so far from wishing to treat with any undue Rigour, that he has more than once extended his Bounty to them in Distress. And when their Writings could not properly be suppressed (as was too often the Case) by lawful Authority, he engaged Men of Abilities to answer them, and rewarded them for their Trouble. His Attention was every where. Even the Falshoods and Misrepresentations of Writers in the News-Papers on religious or ecclesiastical Subjects, he generally took Care to have contradicted; and when they seemed likely to injure in any material Degree the Cause of Virtue and Religion, or the Reputation of eminent and worthy Men, he would sometimes take the Trouble of answering them himself. One Instance of this Kind, which does him Honour, and deserves Mention, was his Defence of Bishop BUTLER, who, in a Pamphlet, published in the Year 1767, was accused of having died a Papist. This strange Slander, founded on the weakest Pretences and most trivial Circumstances that can be imagined, no one was better qualified to confute than the Archbishop; as well from his long and intimate Knowledge of Bishop BUTLER, as from the Information given him



at the Time by those who attended his Lordship in his last Illness, and were with him when he died. Accordingly, by an Article in a News-Paper, signed *Misopseudes*, his Grace challenged the Author of that Pamphlet to produce his Authority for what he had advanced ; and in a second Article defended the Bishop against him ; and in a third (all with the same Signature) confuted another Writer, who, under the Name of *A real Protestant*, still maintained that ridiculous Calumny. His Antagonists were effectually subdued, and his Superiority to them was publicly acknowledged by a sensible and candid Man, who signed himself, and who really was, *A dissenting Minister*. Surely, it is a very unwise Piece of Policy, in those who profess themselves Enemies to Popery, to take so much Pains to bring the most respectable Names within its Pale ; and to give it the Merit of having gained over those who were the brightest Ornaments and firmest Supports of the Protestant Cause.

The Welfare, the Credit, the good Influence of the Clergy he had entirely at Heart, and suffered Nothing to escape his Notice, that could in any proper Way promote them. He earnestly endeavoured to prevent unworthy

. Men

Men from bringing Disgrace on the Profession and Contempt on Religion, by entering into Orders. With this View it was that he so strongly recommended the greatest Care and Caution in signing Testimonials. “ They  
“ are,” says he \*, “ the only ordinary In-  
“ formation that we have in a Case of the  
“ utmost Importance, where we have a Right  
“ to be informed. For no one can imagine,  
“ that we are to ordain whoever comes, or  
“ depend on clandestine Intelligence. We  
“ must therefore, and do depend on regular  
“ Testimonials,—every Part of which ought  
“ to be considered before it is given, and no  
“ Consideration paid to Neighbourhood,  
“ Acquaintance, Friendship, Compassion,  
“ Importunity, when they stand in Compe-  
“ tition with Truth.---It may be sometimes  
“ hard for you to refuse your Hand to im-  
“ proper Persons; but it is only one of the  
“ many Hardships which Conscience bids  
“ Men undergo resolutely when they are  
“ called to them. It would be much harder,  
“ that your Bishop should be misled, the  
“ Church of God injured, and the poor  
“ Wretch himself assisted to invade sacrilegi-  
“ ously an Office, at the Thought of which

\* First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*, P. 222.

“ he hath cause to tremble \*.” If any such however had unhappily found Means to obtain Ordination, he did his utmost to prevent their further Progress ; or if that could not be done, very openly signified his Dislike of their Conduct ; nor could he ever bring himself to treat them, however considerable their Rank might be, with any Marks of Esteem or Respect.

Men of Worth and Eminence in the Church he cherished and befriended, and endeavoured to bring forward into Stations where they might be singularly useful. Above all he distinguished, with peculiar Marks of his Favour, the conscientious and diligent Parish Priest. He was of Opinion, that “ the main “ Support of Piety and Morals consisted in “ the parochial Labours of the Clergy ; and “ that, if this Country could be preserved “ from utter Profligateness and Ruin, it must “ be by their Means †.” For their Assistance therefore in one important Branch of their Duty, he gave them in his third archiepiscopal Charge Directions for writing and speaking Sermons. The Thoughts of such a Man, on so nice and difficult a Subject, must

\* First Charge to the Diocese of *Canterbury*, P. 226.

† Ibid, P. 239.

naturally raise some Expectation, and that Expectation will not be disappointed. They are the evident Result of a sound Judgment, matured by long Experience and a thorough Knowledge of Mankind, and are every Way worthy of one who was himself so great a Master of that Species of Composition and Elocution. It was his Purpose, after speaking of stated Instructions, to have gone on to occasional ones; but he did not live, as he himself foreboded he should not, to accomplish that Design.

The Conduct which he observed towards the several Divisions and Denominations of Christians in this Kingdom, was such as shewed his Way of thinking to be truly liberal and catholic. The dangerous Spirit of Popery indeed, he thought, should always be kept under proper legal Restraints, on Account of its natural Opposition not only to the religious, but the civil Rights of Mankind. He therefore observed its Movements with Care, and exhorted his Clergy to do the same, especially those who were situated in the Midst of Roman Catholic Families; against whose Influence they were charged to be upon their Guard, and were furnished with proper Books, or Instructions for that Purpose. He took  
all

all fit Opportunities of combating the Errors of the Church of *Rome* in his own Writings \*; and the best Answers, which were published to some of the late bold Apologies for Popery, were written at his Instance, and under his Direction. He had the good Fortune to preserve some Persons of Consequence from embracing that Communion, and to receive several Converts from it, both of the Clergy and Laity, into the Church of *England*. When the Earl of *Radnor* moved in the House of Lords for an Enquiry into the Number of Roman Catholics in this Kingdom, his Grace was very active in forwarding that Measure. The Return for his own Diocese was no more than 271; that, for all the Dioceses in *England* and *Wales*, did not exceed 68,000; which, even when all due Allowances are made for unavoidable Errors of Computation in great Towns, more especially in *London*, fell far short of what by some well-meaning Persons they were supposed or represented to be †. And if we further reflect how many  
wealthy

\* See particularly his Sermons on the Rebellion in 1745, on the Protestant Working-Schools in *Ireland*, on the 5th of *November*, and a great Number of occasional Passages to the same Purpose, in various Parts of his *Lectures*, *Sermons*, and other Works.

† Dr. MAYHEW affirms, that in the Year 1745 the Papists in *London* only were 100,000, and that the People there were said

wealthy and noble Families in these Kingdoms have lately embraced the Protestant Religion, each of which would probably draw after it several other Converts of inferior Rank, it will appear perhaps the better-grounded Conjecture of the two, (for it must at last be all Conjecture) that Popery is rather in a declining than a progressive State amongst us. Certain at least it is, that some late Events on the neighbouring Continent have shaken this huge Fabric of Superstition to its very Foundation. One of its grand Supports, the Society of *Jesuits*, is, in many Places, totally subverted; and the *Papal* Power itself is every where falling into Contempt. One may therefore surely hope, that Absurdities which visibly lose Ground even in the most bigotted Countries, will not stand much Chance of retrieving their Loss in this enlightened one.

But though thus prudently jealous of this corrupt Church, towards his Protestant Brethren of all Persuasions, he demeaned himself

to be converted by hundreds and thousands, if not ten thousands every Year.—*Remarks on an anonymous Tract*, &c. P. 73. Had the good Doctor's Account been true, and these Conversions gone on (as some have imagined) encreasing ever since, there would hardly have been a Protestant left by this Time in the Metropolis.

with

with great Mildness and Moderation. One very striking Proof of this occurs in the Directions he gives his Clergy, with Regard to their Conduct towards those who are commonly distinguished by the Name of Methodists \*. It is impossible to read that Passage without acknowledging the Justness of it, and conceiving the highest Opinion of the Writer's Philanthropy and good Sense.

With the *Dissenters* his Grace was sincerely desirous of cultivating a good Understanding. Though firmly attached to the Church of *England*, and ready on all proper Occasions to defend its Discipline and Doctrines with becoming Spirit; yet it never inspired him with any Desire to oppress or aggrieve those of a different Way of thinking, or to depart from the Principles of religious Liberty, by which he constantly regulated his own Conduct †, and wished that all others would regulate theirs. He considered the Protestant

\* Second archiepiscopal Charge, P. 280. .

† A strong Confirmation of these Assertions may be seen in one of his Grace's Letters to Dr. LARDNER, written when he was Bishop of *Oxford*, and preserved in the Memoirs of that learned Man, which have been lately published, P. 98.

*Dissenters* in general as a conscientious and valuable Class of Men, and was far from taking the Spirit of certain Writings to be the Spirit of the whole Body. With some of the most eminent of them, WATTS, DODDRIDGE, LELAND, CHANDLER, LARDNER, he maintained an Intercourse of Friendship or Civility ; by the most candid and considerate Part of them he was highly revered and esteemed ; and to such amongst them as needed Help, shewed no less Kindness and Liberality than to those of his own Communion.

Nor was his Concern for the Protestant Cause confined to his own Country. He was well known as the great Patron and Protector of it in various Parts of *Europe* ; from whence he had frequent Applications for Assistance, which never failed of being favourably received. To several foreign Protestants he allowed Pensions, to others he gave occasional Relief, and to some of their Universities was an annual Benefactor.

There is therefore the utmost Reason to believe that he spoke the Language of his Heart, in Relation to these Matters, in the Conclusion of his Answer to Dr. MAYHEW, which well deserves to be here laid at full Length before the Reader.



“ Our Inclination is to live in Friendship  
 “ with all the Protestant Churches. We assist  
 “ and protect those on the Continent of *Eu-*  
 “ *rope* as well as we are able. We shew our  
 “ Regard to that of *Scotland* as often as we  
 “ have an Opportunity, and believe the Mem-  
 “ bers of it are sensible that we do. To  
 “ those who differ from us in this Part of the  
 “ Kingdom, we neither attempt nor wish any  
 “ Injury; and we shall gladly give Proofs to  
 “ every Denomination of Christians in our  
 “ Colonies, that we are Friends to a Tolerance  
 “ even of the most intolerant, as far as it  
 “ is safe; and willing that all Mankind should  
 “ possess all the Advantages, religious and  
 “ civil, which they can demand either in Law  
 “ or Reason. But with those who approach  
 “ nearer to us in Faith and brotherly Love,  
 “ we are desirous to cultivate a freer Com-  
 “ munication, passing over all former Dis-  
 “ gusts, as we beg that they would. If we  
 “ give them any seeming Cause of Complaint,  
 “ we hope they will signify it in the most  
 “ amicable Manner. If they publish it, we  
 “ hope they will preserve Fairness and Tem-  
 “ per. If they fail in either we must bear  
 “ it with Patience, but be excused from re-  
 “ plying. If any Writers on our Side have  
 “ been

“ been less cool or less civil than they ought  
“ and designed to have been, we are sorry for  
“ it, and exhort them to change their Style  
“ if they write again. For it is the Duty  
“ of all Men, how much soever they differ  
“ in Opinion, to agree in mutual Good-will  
“ and kind Behaviour \*.”

This Passage Dr. MAYHEW himself allows † to be written “ in such a candid, “ sensible, and charitable Way, as did the “ Author great Honour, shewed the amiable “ Spirit of Christianity in an advantageous “ Light,” and was worthy the Pen of a Metropolitan, “ whose Christian Modera- “ tion,” he acknowledges to be “ not the “ least shining Part of his respectable Cha- “ racter ‡.” And it may on the best Grounds be added, that Archbishop SECKER in this Place not only expressed his own real Sentiments, but those of the present truly benevolent Primate, and of far the greatest Part in every Rank of the *English* Clergy in general.

In public Affairs his Grace acted the Part of an honest Citizen, and a worthy Member of the *British* Legislature. From his very

\* Answer to MAYHEW, P. 68.

† MAYHEW's Remarks on an anonymous Pamphlet, P. 83.

‡ Ibid. P. 86.

first Entrance into the House of Peers, his parliamentary Conduct was uniformly upright and noble. He kept equally clear from the two Extremes of factious Petulance and servile Dependence ; never wantonly thwarting Administration, from Motives of Party-Zeal, or private Pique, or personal Attachment, or a Passion for Popularity ; nor yet going every Length with every Minister, from Views of Interest or Ambition. He admired and loved the Constitution of his Country, and wished to preserve it unaltered and unimpaired. So long as a due Regard to this was maintained, he thought it his Duty to support the Measures of Government. But whenever they were evidently inconsistent with the public Welfare, he opposed them with Freedom and Firmness. Yet his Opposition was always tempered with the utmost Fidelity, Respect, and Decency, to the excellent Prince upon the Throne ; and the most candid Allowances for the unavoidable Errors and Infirmities even of the very best Ministers, and the peculiarly difficult Situation of those who govern a free and high-spirited People. He seldom spoke in Parliament, except where the Interests of Religion and Virtue seemed to require it ; but  
whenever

whenever he did, he spoke with Propriety and Strength, and was heard with Attention and Deference. Though he never attached himself blindly to any one Set of Men, yet his chief political Connections were with the late Duke of NEWCASTLE, and Lord Chancellor HARDWICKE. To these he principally owed his Advancement, and he had the good Fortune to live long enough to shew his Gratitude to them or their Descendants, particularly to the former of them: with whose Solicitations though he did not always think it necessary to comply, when that Nobleman was at the Head of Affairs; yet when he was out of Power, the Archbishop readily embraced every Opportunity of obliging him; and gave him so many solid and undeniable Proofs of Friendship, that the Duke always spoke of his Grace's Behaviour to him in the strongest Terms of Approbation, and made particular Mention of it to some of his Friends but a very short Time before his own Death.

During more than ten Years that Dr. SECKER enjoyed the See of *Canterbury*, he resided constantly at his archiepiscopal House at *Lambeth*; as being not only most commodiously situated for his own Studies and Employments, but for all those who on various

Occasions were continually obliged to have Recourse to him. These Reasons weighed with him so much, that no Consideration, not even that of Health itself, could ever prevail upon him to quit that Place for any Length of Time. A few Months before his Death indeed, the dreadful Pains he felt had compelled him to think of trying the *Bath Waters*; but that Design was stopt by the fatal Accident which put an End to his Life.

His Grace had been for many Years subject to the Gout, which in the latter Part of his Life returned with more Frequency and Violence, and did not go off in a regular Manner, but left the Parts affected for a long Time very weak, and was succeeded by Pains in different Parts of the Body. About a Year and a half before he died, after a Fit of the Gout, he was attacked with a Pain in the Arm near the Shoulder, which having continued about a Twelvemonth, a similar Pain seized the upper and outer Part of the opposite Thigh, and the Arm soon became easier. This was much more grievous than the former, as it quickly disabled him from walking, and kept him in almost continual Torment, except when he was in a reclined Position. During this Time he had two or three Fits  
of

of the Gout ; but neither the Gout nor Medicines alleviated these Pains, which, with the Want of Exercise, brought him into a general bad Habit of Body.

On *Saturday* the 30th of *July*, 1768, he was seized, as he sat at Dinner, with a Sickness at his Stomach. He recovered himself before Night, but the next Evening, whilst his Physicians were attending, and his Servants raising him on his Couch, he suddenly cried out that his Thigh-bone was broken. The Shock was so violent, that the Servants perceived the Couch to shake under him, and the Pain so acute and unexpected, that it overcame the Firmness he so remarkably possessed. He lay for some Time in great Agonies, but when the Surgeons arrived, and discovered with Certainty that the Bone was broken, he was perfectly resigned, and never afterwards asked a Question about the Event. A Fever soon ensued. On *Tuesday* he became lethargic, and continued so till about Five o'Clock on *Wednesday* Afternoon, when he expired with great Calmness, in the 75th Year of his Age.

On Examination, the Thigh-bone was found to be carious about four Inches in Length, and at nearly the same Distance from its Head. The Disease took its Rise from

the internal Part of the Bone, and had so entirely destroyed its Substance, that Nothing remained at the Part where it was broken but a Portion of its outward Integument. And even this had many Perforations, one of which was large enough to admit two Fingers, and was filled with a fungous Substance arising from within the Bone. There was no Appearance of Matter about the Caries, and the surrounding Parts were in a sound State. It was apparent, that the Torture which his Grace underwent during the gradual Corrosion of this Bone, must have been inexpressibly great. Out of Tenderness to his Family he seldom made any Complaints to them, but to his Physicians he frequently declared his Pains were so excruciating, that unless some Relief could be procured, he thought it would be impossible for human Nature to support them long. Yet he bore them for upwards of six Months with astonishing Patience and Fortitude; sat up generally the greater Part of the Day, admitted his particular Friends to see him, mixed with his Family at the usual Hours, sometimes with his usual Chearfulness; and, except some very slight Defects of Memory, retained all his Faculties and Senses in their full Vigour till within a few Days of his Death.

He

He was buried, pursuant to his own Directions, in a covered Passage, leading from a private Door of the Palace to the North Door of *Lambeth Church*; and he forbade any Monument or Epitaph to be placed over him.

By his Will he appointed the Reverend Dr. DANIEL BURTON, Canon of *Christ Church*, and Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT above-mentioned, his Executors; and left thirteen thousand Pounds in the three *per Cent.* Annuities, to Dr. PORTEUS and Dr. STINTON, his Chaplains, in Trust; to pay the Interest thereof to Mrs. TALBOT and her Daughter, during their joint Lives, or the Life of the Survivor; and after the Decease of both those Ladies, then eleven thousand of the said thirteen thousand are to be transferred to the following charitable Purposes; *viz*

To the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, for the general Uses of the Society	-	-	}	£.	s.	d.
				1000	0	0
To the same Society, towards the Establishment of a Bishop or Bishops in the King's Dominions in <i>America</i>	-		}	1000	0	0

To



	£.	s.	d.
To the Society for promoting } Christian Knowledge	500	0	0
To the <i>Irish</i> Protestant Working } Schools - - -	500	0	0
To the Corporation for relieving } the Widows and Children of the poor Clergy - - -	500	0	0
To the Society of the Stewards } of the said Charity - -	200	0	0
To <i>Bromley</i> College in <i>Kent</i> -	500	0	0
To the Hospitals of the Arch- bishop of <i>Canterbury</i> , at <i>Croy-</i> <i>don</i> , <i>St. John</i> at <i>Canterbury</i> , and <i>St. Nicholas Harbledown</i> , £.500 each - - - -	1500	0	0
To <i>St. George's</i> and the <i>London</i> Hospitals, and the Lying-in Hospital in <i>Brownlow-street</i> , £.500 each - - -	1500	0	0
To the Asylum in the Parish of } <i>Lambeth</i> - - - -	400	0	0
To the <i>Magdalen Hospital</i> , the <i>Lock Hospital</i> , the <i>Small-Pox</i> and <i>Inoculation Hospital</i> , to } each of which his Grace was a Subscriber, £.300 each -	900	0	0

To

	£.	s.	d.
To the Incurables at <i>St. Luke's</i> } <i>Hospital</i> - - - }	500	0	0
Towards repairing or rebuilding } the Houses belonging to poor } Livings in the Diocese of } <i>Canterbury</i> - - - }	2000	0	0
	<hr/> £.11000 0 0 <hr/>		

Besides these Benefactions, he left £.1000 to be distributed amongst his Servants ; £.200 to such indigent Persons as he had assisted in his Life-time ; £.5000 to the two Daughters of his Nephew Mr. FROST ; £.500 to Mrs. SECKER, Widow of his Nephew Dr. GEORGE SECKER ; and £.200 to Dr. DANIEL BURTON. After the Payment of these and some other smaller Legacies, he left his real, and the Residue of his personal, Estate to his Nephew Mr. THOMAS FROST, of *Nottingham*.

Out of his private Library, he left to the archiepiscopal one at *Lambeth* all such Books as were not there before, which comprehended much the largest and most valuable Part of his own Collection ; and a great Number of very learned MSS. written by himself on various Subjects,

Subjects, he bequeathed to the Manuscript Library in the same Palace. His Lectures on the Catechism, his Manuscript Sermons, &c. he left to be revised and published by his two Chaplains, Dr. STINTON and Dr. PORTEUS. His Options he gave to the Archbishop of *Canterbury*, the Bishop of *London*, and the Bishop of *Winchester*, for the Time being, in Trust; to be disposed of by them (as they become vacant) to such Persons as they shall in their Consciences think it would have been most reasonable and proper for him to have given them, had he been living.

Such were the last Bequests of Archbishop SECKER; of which it is enough to say, that they kept up the noble Uniformity of his Character to the End, and formed a very proper Conclusion to the Life of a truly great and good Man.

His Grace was in his Person tall and comely; in the early Part of Life slender, and rather consumptive, but as he advanced in Years, his Constitution gained Strength, and his Size encreased, yet never to a Degree of Corpulency that was disproportionate or troublesome.

The Dignity of his Form corresponded well with the Greatness of his Mind, and inspired at all Times Respect and Awe, but peculiarly so when he was engaged in any of the more solemn Functions of Religion; into which he entered with such devout Earnestness and Warmth, with so just a Consciousness of the Place he was in, and the Business he was about, as seemed to raise him above himself, and added new Life and Spirit to the natural Gracefulness of his Appearance.

His Countenance was open, ingenuous, and expressive of every Thing right. It varied easily with his Spirits and his Feelings; so as to be a faithful Interpreter of his Mind, which was incapable of the least Dissimulation. It could speak Dejection, and on Occasion, Anger, very strongly. But when it meant to shew Pleasure or Approbation, it softened into the most gracious Smile, and diffused over all his Features the most benevolent and reviving Complacency that can be imagined.

His intellectual Abilities were of a much higher Class than they who never had any Opportunities of conversing intimately with him, and who form their Opinion of his  
Talents

Talents from the general Plainness of his Language only, will perhaps be willing to allow. He had a quick Apprehension, a clear Discernment, a sound Judgment, a retentive Memory: He possessed that native good Sense, which is the grand Master-key to every Art and Science, and makes a Man skilful in Things he has never learnt, as soon as ever it becomes useful or necessary for him to know them. He composed with great Ease and Readiness; and in the early Part of his Life, the Letters which he wrote to some of his most intimate Friends, were full of Imagination, Vivacity, and Elegance. But when he became a Parish-Priest, he found the Graces of Style inconsistent with the Purposes of pastoral Instruction; and willingly sacrificed the Reputation he might easily have acquired as a fine Writer, to the less showy Qualifications of a useful one. From that Time he made it his principal Study to set every Thing he undertook to treat upon in the clearest Point of View; to bring his Thoughts and his Arguments as close together, and to express them in as few and as intelligible Words as possible; admitting none but what conveyed some new Idea, or were necessary

necessary to throw new Light on the Subject; and never waſting his own Time or that of others, by ſtepping out of his Way for needleſs Embellishments. But though in general he thus confined himſelf to the ſevere Laws of didactic Composition, (in which indeed conſiſted his chief Excellence) yet he could be, where the Occaſion called for it, pathetic, animated, nervous; could riſe into that true Sublime, which conſiſts not in Pomp of Diction but Grandeur of Sentiment, expreſſed with Simplicity and Strength; of which his Sermons afford ſeveral admirable Specimens.

It ſeldom happens that Men of a ſtudious Turn acquire any great Degree of Reputation for their Knowledge of Buſineſs. That Love of Solitude and Contemplation which generally attends true Genius, and is neceſſary for any conſiderable Exertion of it, gives at the ſame Time a certain Indolence and Softneſs to the Mind, which equally diſpoſes and unfits it for taking a Part in the buſy Scenes of Life. But Dr. SECKER's Talents were formed no leſs for Action than Speculation; nor was he more embarraſſed with Difficulties in the moſt intricate Affairs, than in the deepeſt Studies. In all the ſeveral Stations  
that

that he passed through, he let Nothing suffer for Want of Attention and Care. Wherever his Advice and Assistance were called for, he never failed to be present, was scrupulously punctual to his Appointments, shewed himself a perfect Master of the Business that came before him, and went through it with Calmness and Dispatch. And it was very observable, that though in all important Transactions, no one had greater Ideas, or proceeded on more enlarged and liberal Principles; yet where it was necessary, he could take Notice of the smallest and seemingly most trifling Circumstances, and enter into the minutest Details with a Penetration and Exactness, which are seldom seen even in those who are most practised in worldly Concerns.

His Learning was very extensive, and on those Points, which he studied with any Degree of Attention, profound. He was well acquainted with the Greek and Latin Languages; had in the younger Part of his Life read with Taste the best Authors in each; and of the latter more especially had imbibed so strong a Tincture, that when he was near seventy, after a Discourse of above forty Years, he composed the Latin Speech printed

at the End of his Charges ; the Style of which is nervous, manly, and correct.

He possessed a large Share of critical Penetration, and scarce ever read any Book of Note without making Remarks upon it. Some of these still remain amongst his Manuscripts. Some he communicated at different Times to the Editors or Translators of several Classic Authors. But his chief Labours of this Kind were bestowed on the holy Scriptures, for which he came well prepared by his Knowledge of the original Languages in which they were writtten. In *Hebrew* Literature more especially, his Skill was so well known and acknowledged, that few Works of Eminence in that Branch of Learning were published, without being first submitted to his Examination, and receiving considerable Improvement from his Corrections. He was the first Promoter, and always a liberal Encourager, of that very useful Work, *The Collation of the Hebrew Manuscripts of the Old Testament*, undertaken by Dr. KENNICOTT, and now brought to a Conclusion. The greatest Part of his leisure Hours was employed in studying the original Text of the sacred Writings ; in comparing it with all the



antient Versions; in collecting together the Remarks made upon it by the most ingenious and learned Authors, antient and modern, Jewish and Christian; in applying to the same Purpose every Thing he accidentally met with in the Course of his reading, that had any Tendency to explain and illustrate it; and superadding to the Whole, his own Observations and Conjectures, some of which have been since confirmed by the best Manuscripts. The Result of their Labours appears, in some Degree, in the short and masterly Explications of Scripture, interspersed occasionally in his Lectures and Sermons; but more particularly in the interleaved Bibles, and the theological Dissertations hereafter mentioned.

But his Attention was not solely confined to the Scriptures. He had studied carefully some of the best Christian Writers of the primitive Ages, and without relying implicitly on their Judgement, or adopting their Errors, knew well how to avail himself of their real Excellencies. Of ecclesiastical History he was a great Master: had a clear Idea of the Progress of Christianity from its first Promulgation to the present Times, of the various Revolu-  
tions

tions it had passed through, the different Grounds on which it had been opposed or vindicated, the Steps by which the Corruptions of it had been gradually introduced, the Arts by which they had been so long maintained, and the providential Coincidence of Events which afterwards contributed to remove them. He was well acquainted with the various Sects, into which the Church was anciently, and is at present divided; he understood the Nature and Tendency of their respective Tenets, the State of the Controversies subsisting amongst them, the respective Merits of their best Writers, the proper Conduct to be observed towards each, and the good Uses that might be made of all. And though in his Writings he never made a needless Ostentation of all this Learning, yet; they who examine some of the plainest of them closely and critically, will find them to be the Result of deep Thought and a comprehensive Knowledge of his Subject; will find that he expresses himself on almost every Point with Propriety, Precision, and Certainty; without any Thing crude or injudicious, without any of those rash Assertions and hasty Conclusions, into which they, who have but a superficial

View of Things, and know not what Ground they stand upon, are perpetually falling.

The best modern Publications in most Parts of useful Learning, but more especially those which immediately related to his own Profession, or were in any Degree connected with it, he constantly read; was one of the first to give a satisfactory Account of them, to commend them if they deserved it, to point out and obviate their Errors, if they contained any which he thought material. But there was one Part of his literary Character extremely amiable, and, in the Degree at least almost peculiar to him; and that was, the incredible Pains he would take in revising, correcting, and improving the Works of others. This he did in numberless Instances besides those which have here been mentioned, with equal Zeal and Judgment; and some of those Compositions which now stand deservedly highest in the Estimation of the Public, and will go down with encreasing Fame to future Ages, owe no inconsiderable Share of their Merit to his Corrections and Communications.

The number of valuable Writings which he has left behind him is very considerable.

Besides

Besides the two Volumes of occasional Sermons, which appeared in his Life-time, the Lectures on the Catechism and the Charges published since his Death, and the four Volumes of Sermons now offered to the Public, he has bequeathed to the Manuscript Library at *Lambeth*, a great Variety of learned and curious Pieces, written by himself, to be preserved there under the sole Care of the Archbishop for the Time being, and to be inspected by no one without his Grace's express Permission.

Amongst these Manuscripts, some of the most remarkable are; an interleaved *English Bible*, in four Volumes in Folio, with occasional Remarks; upon the New Testament very copious; tending chiefly to clear up Difficulties, and to correct and improve the present Translation, with a View probably to a new one; MICHAELIS's *Hebrew Bible*, filled with Comparisons of the antient Versions, Emendations, and Conjectures on the original Text; two Folio Volumes of Notes upon *Daniel*; a great Number of critical Dissertations on controverted Passages of Scripture; Remarks on some modern Publications; and several Volumes of Miscellanies, written in the former

Part of his Life, containing chiefly Extracts from various Authors, and Observations upon them, the Objections of sceptical Writers to the Truth of Revelation, with Answers to some, and Materials or Hints for Answers to many others.

It may justly seem surprising, that in a Life so active, so full of Employment and Avocation from Study\*, the Archbishop could find Leisure to read so much, and to leave behind him so many Writings; some of them learned and critical; all of them full of good Sense and useful Knowledge. The Fact is, that in him were united two Things which very rarely meet together, but, when they do, can produce Wonders, strong Parts, and unwearied Industry. He rose at Six the whole Year round, and had often spent a busy Day, before others began to enjoy it. His whole Time was marked out and appropriated in the most regular Manner to particular Employments, and

\* Ille primum habuit in multiplicibus quibus districtus est curis, nulli deesse; neque quisquam fuit qui literarum studiis majorem operam otiosus posuit, quam ille occupatissimo in loco. In aliis quidem hominibus ingenium excellens, et multiplicem scientiam agnoscimus, in aliis consilium, auctoritatem, probitatem, constantiam; in quo autem hæc omnia ita abunde convenerint haud facile inveniemus. *Concio ad Clerum, & orationumcula, a Gulielmo Markham habitæ, 1769, p. 25.* Sold by T. PAYNE.

he never suffered even those broken Portions of it, which are seldom much regarded, to be idly thrown away. The Strength of his Constitution happily kept Pace with the Activity of his Mind, and enabled him to go on incessantly from one Business to another with almost unremitted Application, till, his Spirits being quite exhausted, he was obliged at last to have Recourse to Rest, which however he always took Care to make as short as possible.

Industry like this, continued through a long Course of Years, could not possibly be the Effect of any Thing but that which was indeed at the Bottom of it, a strong Sense of Duty. It was not because the Archbishop had less Relish for Ease, or less Dislike to Fatigue than other Men, that his Diligence and Perseverance so far exceeded theirs; but because he thought himself bound to labour for the Good of Mankind, and that all Indolence and Self-indulgence, which interfered with this, was in some Degree criminal. Whenever therefore he was engaged (as he was almost continually) in serving others, he never reckoned his own Time or Pains for any Thing, nor did it seem so much as once to enter into his Thoughts, that he ought to allow himself

any Amusement. Even the Pleasures of polite Literature, which were highly grateful to him, he thought himself obliged to relinquish for the peculiar Studies of his Profession, and these again for the practical Duties of Religion, and the daily Offices of common Life. On this Principle he made it a Point to be at all Times accessible. Even in those early Hours, which were more peculiarly dedicated to Retirement and Study, if any one came to him on the smallest Pretence of Business, he would instantly break off the most pleasing or most abstruse Speculations, receive his Visitor with perfect good Humour, and sacrifice those precious Moments to Duty, to Civility, to the slightest Propriety, which he would on no Account have given up to Relaxation or Repose.

This indeed was only one Instance, amongst many others, of that wonderful Command he had obtained over his most favourite Inclinations, and the Facility with which he controlled his strongest Passions. His Temper was naturally quick and impatient; but by keeping a watchful Eye over the Movements of his own Mind, and prescribing to himself certain excellent Rules and Precautions to which he inviolably adhered, he so totally subdued this dangerous

dangerous Propensity, that few who knew him had any Suspicion of his being subject to it. Sometimes indeed, on very trying Occasions, he might be seen ready to kindle on a sudden into some Expressions of Anger, and as suddenly recollecting and checking himself; keeping down the rising Tumult within him, and resuming almost instantaneously his usual Mildness and Composure.

In him appeared all the Efficacy of religious Principle, the Calmness, the Greatness of Mind, the Fortitude, the Chearfulness, which no other Principle could inspire, support, and improve through a whole Life. That fervent yet rational Picty, which glowed in his Writings, which animated his Devotions, was the genuine Effusion of his Soul, the supreme Guide and Director of his Actions and Designs. It was not, as is sometimes the Case, assumed occasionally, and laid aside when the Eye of the World was not upon him; but was the same in private as in public, to those who observed him at a Distance, and those who lived and conversed intimately with him, who had Opportunities of seeing him at all Hours, and under all Circumstances, in his retired and serious as well as in his freest and most chearful Moments.



Moments. The Honour of God, and the Interests of Religion, were evidently nearest his Heart. He thought of them, he talked of them, he was concerned and anxious for them, he sought out for Opportunities of advancing them, he was careful not to say or do any Thing that might hurt them in the Estimation of Mankind. This it was which kept up that uniform Decency and Propriety so remarkable in his whole Deportment, which preserved him from every unbecoming Levity of Behaviour and Conversation, added Weight and Dignity to his Character, and raised him above all the common Meannesses of merely secular Men.

His Soul was generous beyond Description. Even when his Income was but moderate, and the Provision made for his Family very slender, he lived hospitably, and gave liberally. As his Revenues encreased, his Beneficence rose in Proportion, insomuch, that after the first Expences of his Promotion to the See of *Canterbury* were over, his charitable Donations were considerably more than two thousand Pounds a Year. On all proper Occasions his Heart and his Hand were so free, that he seemed not to have, as indeed he had not, the  
least

least Regard for Money. The Ease and Readiness with which he gave away the largest Sums, plainly shewed, that long Habit had rendered it quite natural and familiar to him, and that he saw Nothing wonderful or extraordinary in Acts of Generosity, which others could not observe without Surprise.

They who applied to him on Account of any public Subscription, in Favour of any Thing useful or even ornamental to his Country, commonly received much more than they expected; and were frequently withheld from repeating their Solicitations, through Fear, not of being denied, but of trespassing too far on a Liberality that seemed to know no Bounds. In Matters of private Charity, the Number of indigent Persons whom he relieved by occasional Benefactions, or supported by annual Pensions, was very great. Yet his Favours were not lavished away with undistinguishing Profusion. He took Pains to find out the real Merits and Distresses of those who asked Relief from him, and endeavoured, as far as he was able, to single out the virtuous and religious, as peculiar Objects of his Bounty. He thought it a material Part of true Benevolence, to have an Eye not only to the Removal of Misery, but the Encouragement

ment of Piety and good Morals. With this View he was particularly attentive to such Charities as were calculated to advance useful Knowledge or spiritual Improvement; which he made a Point of encouraging by his Example, not only as being in themselves highly beneficial, but also strangely disregarded sometimes by very worthy, and, in other Respects, very considerate Persons.

In the Government of his Family, there was an Air of Ease and Generosity without any Affectation of Magnificence or Show. His House was hospitable, and his Table plentiful, yet plain and simple. He wished to have every Thing suitable to his Rank, but would consent to Nothing beyond it. He thought it right in one of his Station and Profession to discountenance, as far as he could, all luxurious Elegancies. He would therefore never give into several fashionable Accommodations, nor admit extraordinary Delicacies to his Table, nor even accept them when offered to him. He received his Company with Politeness and good Humour, and entertained them, when he was in Health and Spirits, with lively and improving Conversation. He could make pertinent Observations on almost any Topic that happened to be started, how remote  
soever

foever from the natural Course of his Studies. Men of eminent Worth or Learning he distinguished by peculiar Notice, led the Discourse to such Subjects as called out their respective Excellencies, and shewed that they spoke before one who could judge well of their Merits.

Yet it must be owned that he was not always equally affable and obliging. There was sometimes a Reserve and Coldness in his Manner, that threw a Damp on Conversation, and prevented Strangers from being perfectly at their Ease before him. This was by some imputed to Pride. But in Reality it arose from very different Causes: sometimes from bodily Pain, which he often felt when he did not own it; sometimes from his Spirits being wasted or depressed by the Fatigues of the Morning; sometimes from accidental Uneasinesses arising in the Course of Business, which he could not immediately shake off his Mind. To this should be added, that the natural Loftiness of his Figure, and the Opinion generally and justly entertained of his Learning and Strictness of Life, were of themselves apt to produce a Kind of Awe and Constraint in his Company, when he was far from wishing to inspire it.

It was remarkable that he chose always rather to talk of Things than Persons; was very sparing in giving his Opinion of Characters, very candid when he did. Of his own good Deeds or great Attainments he never spoke, nor loved to hear others speak. Compliments were very irksome to him. They visibly put him out of Humour, and gave him actual Pain; and he would sometimes express his Dislike of them in such plain Terms, as effectually prevented a Repetition of them from the same Person.

To his Domestics he was a gentle and indulgent Master. Many of them he suffered to continue with their Families in his House after they were married. None of them were discharged on Account of Sicknefs or Infirmity, but were assisted with the best Advice that could be had at a great yearly Expence. Those who had attended him in Illness, or served him long and faithfully, he never failed to reward with an unsparing Hand. Towards his other Dependants, his Behaviour was even and friendly. He expected every one about him to do their Duty, of which he himself first set them the Example; and, provided they did so with any tolerable

tolerable Care, they were secure of his Favour. Of slight Faults he took no Notice; of great ones he would express his Sense at the Time strongly; but never suffered them to dwell or rankle on his Mind, or operate to the future Prejudice of those whose general Conduct was right. To his Relations he was continually doing the best-natured, the handsomest, the most generous Things; assisting them in Difficulties, comforting them in Affliction, promoting their Interests, and improving their Circumstances reasonably, not aggrandizing or enriching them invidiously.

The unaltered Kindness he shewed to the two Ladies that lived with him from the Time of his Marriage to that of his Death, that is, for upwards of two-and-forty Years, was a remarkable Instance of steady Friendship; and shewed that his Soul was no less formed for that rare Union of virtuous Minds, than for every other generous Affection. The younger of those two Ladies, Mrs. CATHERINE TALBOT, (who, to the finest Imagination and the most elegant Accomplishments of her Sex, added the gentlest Manners, and a Disposition thoroughly benevolent and devout,) did not long survive the  
Arch-

Archbishop. She died on the 9th of *January* last, in the 49th Year of her Age.

Thus much it has been judged requisite to lay before the World in Relation to Archbishop SECKER ; not with any View of exalting his Character higher than it deserves, which is quite needless ; but of making its real Value more generally known, and of rescuing it from the Misrepresentations of a few misinformed or malevolent Men. To some, no Doubt, the Portrait here drawn of him will appear a very flattering one ; but it will be much easier to call than to prove it such. Nothing has been advanced but what is founded on the most authentic Evidence, nor has any Circumstance been designedly strained beyond the Truth. And if his Grace did really live and act in such a Manner that the most faithful Delineation of his Conduct must necessarily have the Air of a Panegyric, the Fault is not in the Copy, but in the Original.

After this plain Representation of Facts therefore, it cannot be thought necessary to enter here into a particular Examination of the various Falshoods, which his Grace's Enemies have so industriously circulated in order

der to fix, if possible, some Stain upon his Reputation. It would be very unreasonable to expect that he of all others, so high in Rank and so active in the Discharge of his Duty, should, amidst the present Rage of Defamation, escape without his full Share of Censure; and it would be very weak to apprehend the least ill Consequences from it. There is so little Doubt from what Quarter those Invectives come, and to what Causes they are owing, that they do not appear to have made the slightest Impression on any unprejudiced Mind, and, for Want of Ground to support them, are sinking hourly into Oblivion. If a Life spent like Archbishop SECKER's, and a Spirit such as breathes through every Page of his Writings, are not a sufficient Confutation of all such idle Calumnies, it is in vain to think that any Thing else can be so. All that his Friends have to do, is to wait a little while with Patience and Temper. Time never fails to do ample Justice to such Characters as his; which, if left to themselves, will always rise by their own Force above the utmost Efforts made to depress them, and acquire fresh Lustre every Day in the Eyes of all considerate and dispassionate Men.



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S E R-

# S E R M O N I.

I T H E S S. V. 21, 22.

*Prove all Things: hold fast that which is good:  
abstain from all Appearance of Evil.*

**B**Y the extensive Word, *all*, the Apostle in this Place evidently means no more, than *all Things* which may be right or wrong in Point of Conscience. And by *proving them* he means, not that we should try them both by Experience, which would be an absurd and pernicious Direction: but that we should examine them by our Faculty of Judgment, which is a wise and useful Exhortation. Accordingly Christianity recommends itself to us at first Sight by this peculiar Presumption of its being the true Religion, that it makes Application to Men as reasonable Creatures, and claims our Assent on Account of the Proofs, which it offers. By these alone it prevailed originally: on these it still relies; and requires

VOL. V.

A

Faith

Faith for the Principle of our Obedience, only because it produces Evidence for the Ground of our Faith. Now such an Institution surely is intitled to receive the fair Treatment which it gives, when it asks of Mankind no more than this ; that they should first consider well the several Obligations they are under ; then adhere to whatever they find to be enjoined them, and lastly avoid whatever they conceive to be forbidden : which momentous Duties I shall endeavour to explain, and enforce in three Discourses on the Text.

That Beings, capable of Thought, are obliged to think, is very obvious : that they should think with the greatest Care on Subjects of the greatest Importance, is equally so : and the Question, what Obligations we are under, is plainly of the utmost Importance. For our Behaviour, and consequently our Happiness, depends on the Determination of it. Therefore we are just as much bound to conduct our Understandings well, as our Tempers or outward Actions. And the Opportunities given us of shewing, either Diligence in procuring Information, and Fairness in judging upon it, or the contrary, are Trials, which God hath appointed, of every one's moral Character ;  
and

## S E R M O N - I.

and perhaps the chief Trials, which some have to go through. Every Instance, greater or less, of wilfully disregarding Truth, instead of seeking and embracing it, argues a proportionable Depravity of Heart; whether the Dislike be manifested in a studious Opposition to it, or an indolent Scorn of it.

There are some who openly profess an utter Contempt of all Inquiry; despise such as are solicitous either about Belief or Practice, and even affect a Thoughtlessness, which they find to be grown fashionable. 'Now really, if this be an Accomplishment, it is one, that whoever will may easily be Master of. But surely Men ought to think seriously once for all, before they resolve for the rest of their Days to think no more. There are strong Appearances, that many Things of great Consequence are incumbent on us. No one can be sure, that these Appearances are fallacious, till he hath examined into them. Many, who have, are fully persuaded of their Truth. And if there be such Things in the World as Folly and Guilt, it can never be either wise or innocent to disdain giving ourselves any Trouble about the Matter, and take it absolutely for granted, that we may live as we will: a De-

cision of such a Nature, that were it made on seemingly ever so good Grounds, it would be very fit to review them well from Time to Time, for Fear of a Mistake that must be fatal.

And if a general Neglect of considering our Conduct be criminal, a Neglect of considering any Part of it must, in its Degree, be criminal also. Many have weighed carefully, and observe conscientiously, some Duties of Life; but will not reflect a Moment, whether it be allowable for them to behave, in other Points, as they do. And yet, if any moral Obligation deserves Regard, every such Obligation deserves it equally. And when the Question comes to be, what is indeed such, and what not, impartial Reason, well directed, must be Judge; not Inclination or Fancy: for if these can make Things lawful, nothing will be unlawful. And therefore, instead of ever following such Guides implicitly, we should always have the greater Suspicion that we are going wrong, the more vehemently they press us to go forward.

Some again have searched, and obtained Satisfaction, they say, concerning every Article of Morals; but will not concern themselves about Religion. Yet surely the Inquiry, whether

there be a wise and just Ruler of this Universe or not ; and if there be, what Homage he expects from us ; and what we have to hope or fear from him, according as we pay it, or refuse it ; is as material a one, as ever was made. And on what Pretence any one can doubt whether it be worth making, and reverently too, it is impossible to say.

Another Sort declare, that they have a settled Conviction of natural Religion, (would God they would ask their Hearts, what Feelings of it they cultivate, what marks of it they shew,) but treat Revelation at the same Time, as totally unworthy of being considered. Yet that our heavenly Father can give us very useful Information both of what we did not know before, and of what we could not know else, is at least as credible, as it is certain that we can give such one to another. And that he may with Justice give some Men greater Advantages than others by supernatural Discoveries, is no less clear, than that he may give them such Advantages by their natural Abilities and Circumstances. If then God may do this for us, it is a most interesting Question, whether he hath or not ; and an indispensable Precept, which the Words, immediately

preceding the Text, express what joined with it. *Despise not Prophecies: prove all Things.*

But there is yet a different Set of Persons, who confess, that both our Attention, and our Assent, are due to Christianity in general, but who are against discussing any of its Doctrines in particular. Provided Men know but enough of it, to keep them well-behaved and quiet, nothing further, they conceive, is needful: whatever Sentiments about speculative Points happen to prevail, should be supported, and no Disputes allowed to break in upon the Peace of the World. Now it is very true, that Society should not be disturbed by Contentions about Opinions, as it hath often been most dreadfully: nor Men be perplexed about Questions of mere Curiosity, instead of learning better Things; nor frightened, or estranged from each other by laying Stress on Points of mere Nicety. And the New Testament strongly forbids all these Things. But still, if the Christian Religion be from Heaven, it cannot be a Matter of Indifference, what its real Doctrines are: nor can its Author have given us the Liberty of professing others in their Stead. Some of them may seem, and perhaps may be, though that doth not follow, of small Con-  
sequence

sequence to the Purposes of common Life: but if they convey to us just Notions of God, and of those Relations of ours to him, which are never the less real for not being discoverable by Reason; if they instruct us in the Duties, which those Relations require, and form us to that State of Mind, which he knows to be requisite for enjoying the Happiness of another World, be their Connexion with this World ever so little, surely they are important enough. Some of them also have Doubts and Difficulties attending them; as even the Doctrines of natural Religion, and the Duties of Morality have: but these were intended to furnish us with Opportunities of shewing Uprightness in judging where we are qualified to judge, and Humility in submitting our shallow Imaginations to unfathomable Wisdom, where we are not: the Exercise of which Virtues here will fit us for a plentiful Reward hereafter. And would Men but once prevail on themselves to express their Thoughts on controverted Subjects with Decency and Candour: Society, instead of suffering by Debates, would receive much Benefit. Christianity would be better understood; and therefore more justly esteemed, and more discreetly practised: it would be



built on firmer Foundations, and therefore be securer against all Assaults.

- There still remains a large Number of Christians, I mean the Advocates of the Church of *Rome*, who are indeed by no Means indifferent what Doctrines are held, but vehemently oppose entering into any Disquisitions about them ; and would have us, instead of that, first look out for an infallible Guide, and then follow him blindfold. But they have never been able to shew, that such Infallibility exists amongst Men ; or even to agree with each other determinately, in whom they should place it. And the Scripture, far from directing us to examine this one Claim, and after that never to examine more, directs us in many Places, but particularly in the Text, by as plain Words as can be written, to *prove*, that is, *examine, all Things*. But were this otherwise, their Pretension will require no long Examination : for it is in vain to argue that such or such Men cannot mistake, when it notoriously appears in Fact, that they have mistaken.

Every Article therefore both of Morals and Religion may and ought to be tried, in such Manner as can be reasonably expected from the Parts, Attainments and Circumstances of  
each

each Person: and concerning this, we should both judge modestly for ourselves, and consult others with Deference. For attempting too much will be more likely to mislead, than improve us.

But then the more general and important this Duty of Inquiry is, the more Care must be taken to perform it aright. For many pique themselves on a most unbounded Zeal for Freedom of Thought, and a thorough Search into Things, who yet by no Means deserve the Character which they assume.

Some of them fancy they have thought very freely upon Religion. Now this is, in one Sense, treating it freely indeed, but no Proof of thinking upon it at all. For mere disbelieving is no more an Evidence of having examined, than mere believing is. However, at least, they say, they have thrown off the Prejudices, in which they were bred up: and throwing off Prejudices must be right. But then they are many of them for extirpating, under that odious Name, original natural Dispositions in the Heart of Man. For Instance: the Propensity, that we all experience to revere an invisible Power; the esteem that we all feel of Justice and Truth, of Mercy and Good-

Goodness, of Honour and Decency ; are as real Constituents of our inward Frame, as any Passion or Appetite, that belongs to it. Yet these Principles, which direct us to every Thing that is good, they would persuade us to root out as Prejudices ; while they plead earnestly for the Inclinations, that continually prompt us to Vice, as Dictates of Nature. And a Part of our Nature undoubtedly they are : but a Part lamentably disordered ; and which, in its best Estate, the other and higher was evidently designed to govern and restrain. At least, to set out with taking the contrary for granted ; and condemn Things at once, as groundless Prepossessions, which have so respectable an Appearance of being the primitive Guides of Life, is by no Means inquiring freely.

Another, false Notion concerning Prejudices, though at first Sight a plausible one, is, that we ought to divest ourselves of all Desire to find Religion true, before we go about to judge of it. Now it is impossible, that a Person of a worthy Mind should do so. He may indeed, and will take Care, not to be misled by his Desire. But he neither can, nor ought to be indifferent concerning a Point, on which his own eternal Happiness, and that of every good Man

upon

upon Earth, depends. Nor is this the only Case, far from it, in which we are bound to wish on one Side, and yet determine fairly between both. In judicial Proceedings, a benevolent Magistrate will constantly wish, that whoever is accused before him may prove innocent: notwithstanding which, he will try his Cause with the most upright Impartiality.

But if this Degree of Prepossession in Favour of Religion be right, how exceedingly wrong must Prepossession against it be! What are we to think of those, and what have they Cause to think of themselves, who can take Pleasure in that comfortless and horrid View of Things, which Infidelity gives; and triumph in believing, that *there is no Reward for the Righteous, no God that judgeth the Earth*\*! One would hope they do not see distinctly, and yet it is exceedingly visible, what Malevolence to Human Kind rejoicing in a Thought of this Nature implies.

Or if they do not wish against Religion in general, yet, if they wish against the Christian Religion, they are Enemies to a Doctrine, which confirms very powerfully all the great Truths that Reason teaches; which clears up,

\* Psalm lviii. 10.

intirely to our Advantage, many tormenting Doubts, that Reason leaves us involved in ; and which, however it may have been perverted, (as every good Thing in the World hath) undeniably is in its Nature an Institution the most completely fitted to make Men happy in themselves and one another, in the present State and the future, that ever was. Did we then see those, who profess themselves unsatisfied about its Evidence, afraid it was insufficient ; grieved that the Proofs appeared no stronger, and the Objections so considerable ; this would shew a Mind, which the Scripture calls *noble<sup>b</sup>, not far from the Kingdom of God<sup>c</sup>*. And at Times, they most of them affect to seem thus disposed ; and will assure such as press them upon the Subject, that, of all Things, they wish they could but be so happy as to believe. But why then were they in such Haste to disbelieve, and most of them to act viciously upon their Disbelief ? Why would they not hear and consider first ? Why will they not now reconsider the Subject, and acquaint themselves with the Defences of our Faith, as well as the Attacks made upon it ? Why do they delight in making Converts of all that they can ? Why are they so prone to ridicule,

<sup>b</sup> Acts xvii. 2.

<sup>c</sup> Mark xii. 34.

or calummate those, whom they cannot? Such Symptoms look very suspicious; and should induce those, who are conscious of them, to put the Question home to themselves, whether this great good Will to Religion be really the Temper, with which they have ever enquired into it, or do now inwardly think of it; or whether indeed their Professions are only a specious Manner of talking, occasionally taken up to serve a Turn. If the latter be the Case, they must, in order to be fair Doubters, guard against another Sort of Prejudices, than they imagined.

Some Prejudices, either right or wrong, will take hold of us very soon. And therefore it is fit, that as far as we can, we should examine the Foundation of our early Opinions; but with Equity, with Candour, not with a Resolution beforehand to find Fault: for as they are never the truer for our being educated in them, they are never the falser either. But indeed the Education of many hath placed them so very little in the Way, either of receiving Prejudices, or hearing Arguments in Favour of Religion; that they have Need to begin with throwing off Prejudices to its Disadvantage; and should suspect that much more may be said for it, than the little, which hath come to their Knowledge.

It

It is probable, that they might have some Impressions of Piety, such as they were, made upon them by the Superintendants of their Childhood; and it is possible, that something may have been added since to these Impressions, by their Attendance, if haply they have been suffered to attend, on public Instruction. But as soon as they begin to see a little more of the World, and observe what passes around them, what a Number of Things will they meet with, likely to give them a much stronger Bias towards Infidelity, than the Forms of a common Education have given them towards Faith ! They will find but too many declared Unbelievers, and even Teachers of Unbelief : very many, who, if they do not expressly deny Christianity, speak and act as if they despised it ; and few, in Comparison, that vouchsafe it a serious and uniform Regard. The Abuses of Religion they will hear most invidiously magnified ; the Benefits of it most artfully and maliciously depreciated ; the public Worship of God condemned, as idle Formality ; the private, as enthusiastic Folly ; the Ministers of his Word represented as Objects only of Contempt or Abhorrence : and the Consequence hath been, that, by thinking of us in a Manner, which, with all our Faults, God forbid we should

should deserve, Multitudes are come to think of the Gospel, that we preach, in a Manner, which they certainly ought not, did we deserve ever so ill. When Prejudices from without like these, are added to the vehement ones within, which Vanity forms against every Thing that would humble it, and Passions and Appetites against every Thing that would restrain them ; it is easy to perceive, where the Danger of Partiality lies ; and what Prepossessions the Company they have kept, the Books they have read, the Lives they have led, make necessary to be banished by too many, if they would become fair Enquirers.

Let it therefore be examined, on what Foundation the Notions, that we have learned, of Religion and Virtue stand. But let it be examined also, on what Foundation the prevailing Notions, which contradict Religion and Virtue stand. For to lay it down as a Maxim, that these are well groundèd, and discard the former merely on that Presumption, is monstrously unreasonable. We own it to be highly proper, that Men should ask themselves, why they believe : but it is equally proper for them to ask, why they disbelieve. Undoubtedly they should not be Bigots and Zealots :



lots: but then they should not be so against Religion, any more than for it. Implicit Faith is wrong: but implicit Infidelity is yet more so. And whatever Fault may be found with the Trust, which it is said the godly repose in their spiritual Guides; it is full as possible, and perhaps in Proportion full as frequent, for the ungodly to follow one another on to their Lives End, with their Eyes close shut, each in the most servile Reliance on what his Leader tells him; only with the ridiculous Addition of admiring most immoderately, all the Way, their own wonderful Freedom of Thought.

• By such Considerations as these, Men should prepare their Minds for beginning to inquire. And when they do begin, it is an important Rule, not to be too hasty in drawing Conclusions, especially bold ones. Viewing Things on every Side, observing how far Consequences reach, and proceeding to collect and hear Evidence, till Reason ~~says~~ there needs no more, is grievous Labour to Indolence and Impatience, and by no Means answers the Ends of Conceit and Affectation. A shorter Way therefore is commonly taken. Some Objection of minute Sophistry strikes their Thoughts unexpectedly, or comes recommended to them as highly fashionable

onable: and whether a solid Answer can be given to it, they never ask. Some Argument, urged in Favour of Religion, proves or seems to be a weak one: and, without more ado, they infer, that the rest are no stronger. Some Things, which have been generally received, they find or apprehend are false or doubtful; and therefore Nothing, they imagine, is certain. Some Text of Scripture, possibly transcribed or translated amiss, is hard to defend, or to reconcile with some other; and therefore they flight the Whole. Some Doctrine, which Revelation is said to teach, appears hard to understand or admit, or is capable of a ludicrous Turn: and therefore immediately they reject, not only that, but others not in the least connected with it; throw aside at once the intire System; and, it may be, plunge headlong into Vice. Yet, all the while, Revelation perhaps doth not teach this Doctrine, and they are offended solely at a Phantom of their own dressing up; or perhaps teaches it with great Reason, for any Thing which they can ever prove to the contrary. For in a Nature so unfearchable as that of God, and a Scheme so vast as that of his universal Government, there must be many Things, which Creatures of our

limited Faculties cannot approach towards comprehending; and, merely for Want of comprehending, may fancy to be full of Incredibilities, which, could we but know more, or would we but remember that we know so little, would instantly vanish. In Matters therefore, which we understand so very imperfectly, to set up human Imagination against divine Authority; to rely on crude Notions, that Things are impossible, which proper Testimony shews to be true in Fact; or that God cannot be, or do, what, by his own Declarations, he is, and hath done, betrays a Disposition widely distant from the Modesty which becomes us.

Besides, were the Difficulties which attend the System of Religion, more considerable than they are; yet we should take Notice, that Difficulties attend the contrary System also; and consider, since one must be true, which is most likely to be so. If there be Objections against a Creation and a Providence; are there not greater against supposing, that the World could have existed without being created, or continue all this Time without a Providence? If there be somewhat scarce conceivable in the Doctrine of a future Life and Judgement: yet upon the Whole, which of the two is most probable,

probable, that a wise and good God will finally recompense Men according to their Works, or that he will not? If there be Things in the Gospel-Revelation, for which it is hard to account, is it so hard to account for any Thing upon Earth, as how it should come to have such astonishing Proofs, internal and external, of being true, if it be really false? They who think the Creed of a Christian so strange and mysterious, let them think a while, what the Creed of an Infidel must be, if he would only lay aside his general Pretences of Imposture and Enthusiasm and Credulity and Bigotry, which thrown out at random will discredit all Evidence of History alike; and answer in particular, how, on his own Hypothesis, he accounts for all the several notorious Facts, on which our Religion is built. I am persuaded, there hath never appeared yet amongst Men so incomprehensible a Collection of Tenets, as this would produce. Men may indeed be too easy of Belief: but it is just as great a Weakness to be too full of Suspicion. Reverence for Antiquity may impose upon us: but Fondness for Novelty may do the same Thing. Undoubtedly we should be on the Watch against pious Frauds: but against impious ones too. For

whatever Dishonesty the Advocates of Religion have been either justly or unjustly charged with, the Opposers of it have given full Proof, at least of their Inclination not to come short of them. Whoever therefore would proceed in the right Path, must be attentive to the Dangers on each Side.

Perhaps this may seem to require more Pains than most Persons are capable of. But of an upright Disposition every one is capable: and with this, common Abilities and Leisure will suffice to judge concerning the necessary Points of Faith and Practice. Few indeed, or none, can judge of any Thing without relying in some Measure on the Knowledge and Veracity of others. And what must we think of human Nature, or what will become of human Society, if we can take Nothing on each other's Word? We should hearken to no one indeed, who asserts plain Absurdities. And we should always judge for ourselves as far as we can. But we should not affect to do it farther. Where we visibly want, either Parts or Learning or Time for it, as we frequently do in worldly Affairs of great Moment, no less than in Religion, we are both allowed and obliged to depend on others. Only we must observe these

these two Directions : that we first pay a due Respect to that legal Authority, under which Providence hath placed us : and then chuse, according to the best of our Understandings, the worthiest and wisest and most considerate Persons to be our Conductors. For as we should never hastily run after uncommissioned Guides, so above all Things we should beware of artful or self-sufficient, of rash and impetuous ones: which last, however it happens, Men are peculiarly apt to follow, though almost sure of being led by them, not only wrong, but great Lengths in what is wrong: whereas there are no plainer Rules of Behaviour than these, that in Proportion as we are in the Dark, we should go on gently: and whenever there may be Hazard, keep on the safer Side.

He that will conduct himself thus, may soon make large Advances in religious Knowledge: and wherever he stops, needs not be uneasy. Though the Arguments, which he hath for his Faith, may not be the strongest: yet a *Tree*, but weakly rooted, often *brings forth good Fruit*; and if it doth, will never *be hewn down, and cast into the Fire*<sup>d</sup>. Though he may

<sup>d</sup> Matth. iii. 10. vii. 19.

be ignorant of many Things, and doubt or even err concerning many others, yet they may be of small Importance : or, though of great, yet having used a competent Care to inform himself, he will obtain Pardon. We cannot indeed say with Exactness, how much of their Time and Pains Men are bound to spend upon Examination, any more than how much of their Wealth in Works of Charity : and the less, as both Duties vary according to the Circumstances of every Individual. But let each consult his Conscience, with a serious Desire of being told the Truth, whether it hath been, and is now, his habitual Endeavour to determine and to act as rightly as he can : and, if the Answer be clearly in his Favour, when he is neither disposed to frighten nor flatter himself, let him trust in God, *and be at Peace*. For *like as a Father loveth his Children, so the Lord loveth them that fear him*.

Not that, after all, it is indifferent, whether we fall into Errors concerning Religion, or escape them. For both Mistakes and bare Ignorance, where they are accompanied with little or no Guilt, may often be followed by great Disadvantages. Wrong Notions in the

Job xxi. 21.

1 Psal. ciii. 13.

Under-

Understanding may produce wrong Movements in the Heart ; which, even when they will not bring down upon us future Punishment, may unfit us for certain Degrees of future Reward. And, on the contrary, a larger Portion of Piety and Virtue, and therefore of heavenly Felicity, may prove to be the natural Consequence of a more extensive Acquaintance with Gospel Truths. So that, in the Reason of Things, as well as the sure Foundation of divine Promises, good Christians are intitled to expect those distinguished Glories in a better World, for which, others, though, in Proportion to their Talents, truly good, may not be qualified.

But still it is allowable to hope, and to rejoice in hoping, that a Being unspeakably gracious will confer some Measure of Happiness hereafter on all the Sons of Men, who have not made themselves incapable of it ; and that neither involuntary nor excusable Misapprehensions will exclude any from it. If indeed, under Colour of reasoning freely, Men will argue fallaciously, conclude precipitately, and behave presumptuously ; talk and do what they please without Modesty or Fear ; and set themselves up, on this Merit, for the only Assertors



of Liberty, when in Truth they are willing Slaves to a wicked Mind; these, of all Men, *have no Cloke for their Sin<sup>s</sup>*. But the virtuous and humble Inquirer, who studies to conduct his Understanding with impartial Care first, and his Life with inoffensive Sincerity afterwards, yet, conscious of his many Failings, begs for Pardon and Strength to be given him in such Manner as his Maker sees fit, may surely comfort himself with pleasing Expectations of Acceptance after Death. *As many therefore, as walk according to this Rule, Peace be on them, and Mercy, and upon the Israel of God<sup>h</sup>*.

<sup>g</sup> John xi. 22.

<sup>h</sup> Gal. vi. 16.

## S E R M O N II.

I THESS. V. 21, 22.

*Prove all Things : hold fast that which is good :  
abstain from all Appearance of Evil.*

**T**HE first Duty of reasonable Creatures, with Respect to Religion, is, informing themselves, as fully as their natural Abilities, their Improvements in Knowledge, and their Condition of Life permit, concerning its Truth, and the Doctrines it teaches. Multitudes are unable to proceed far in this Inquiry: of the rest, some totally neglect it, some carry it on with less Care and Integrity, or fewer Advantages, than others. And hence it comes to pass, that different Persons think upon the Subject in very different Manners: and even the same Person, in Progress of Time, very differently from himself. But then every State of Mind, that Men can be in, relative to these Matters, hath its proper Obligations belonging to it: and, for Want of paying due Re-  
gard

gard to them, they whose Opinions are right may be very bad in their Practice ; and they whose Opinions are wrong, much worse, than even their own Notions, by any just Consequence, allow them to be. Not uncommonly indeed the Goodness of Mens Nature prevails, through God's Mercy, in some Points, over the ill Tendency of their Principles ; and makes them better, than they profess themselves. But much oftener they run into such Behaviour, as must be unwarrantable, according to the very Doctrines, which they have embraced. And therefore every one should consider well, to what Sort of Conduct these really direct him, and from what they restrain him. Men may think, they could not help being of the Opinions they are : but if they take still greater Liberties, than their Opinions lead them to ; instead of suspecting, that possibly they may lead them too far : this they must know to be their own Fault ; and, while they indulge it, one doth not see, what they will stop at : whereas keeping carefully within the Bounds, which their Judgement sets them, will be the best Excuse they can have, in their present Way of thinking, and the likeliest Means of discerning and amending the Errors of it.

Having

Having therefore laid before you, in the first Place, the Duty of *proving all Things*, and the general Disposition of Mind, with which it should be done : I proceed now to the consequent Duty, of *holding fast that which is good*, and *abstaining from all Appearance of Evil*. And as the Appearances of Good and Evil must vary, according to the Notions, which are espoused about them ; it will be useful to consider those of Unbelievers, as well as Believers : for which Purpose, there must be some extraordinary Suppositions made : but I hope the truly pious will neither think them shocking, nor useless ; being introduced only for the Sake of suggesting to them such Things, as though they want not for themselves, or for others like them, they may perhaps employ to good Effect for convincing or silencing Infidels and Libertines, when Occasion requires : and there hath seldom been more Occasion, than at present.

To begin then with imagining a worse Case, than perhaps is possible. Were any one persuaded, not only that all Religion is groundless, but that Virtue and Vice, Right and Wrong, are mere Words without Meaning : yet even such a one, if he did not think Wisdom and Folly, Pleasure and Pain, empty Sounds  
too ;

too; would have some Rule of Conduct, so far as it reached. Still it would be Matter of serious Consideration, what Behaviour promises the most Happiness, upon the Whole, to such Beings, plac'd in such a World, as we are. And our present Interest here, had we no other Guide, far from permitting us to do every mad Thing, that Passion, Appetites or Fancies, prompt us to, would direct us, in a great Measure, to a Course of Honesty, Friendliness and Sobriety. For not only Life and Health, and Safety and Quiet; of which no other Method can possibly give us, in general, near so good a Prospect; are of much too high Importance, to be hazarded wantonly: but Reputation also is a Matter of no small Value; and Peace within of greater still. Now suppose there were no Reason in the least for any one to feel Satisfaction in doing good-natured and just Things, or Uneasiness from the Reflection of having done cruel and base ones; yet, as in Fact, almost, if not absolutely, all Persons do feel both; to aim at the former, and avoid the latter, is, with Regard to Principle, a Dictate of common Prudence.

But farther, whatever some may think of moral Obligation themselves, they have many  
Reasons

Reasons to desire, that the World about them should think highly of it. For though Discretion, abstracted from Sense of Duty, might reasonably, in most Cases, restrain those, with whom we are concerned, from using us ill; yet it will restrain them but in few Instances; and then very imperfectly. So that whoever is considerate, will be extremely unwilling to weaken the Bonds of human Society: which he will find, at best, are by no Means too strong. And therefore, shou'd he think it his own Interest to be wicked; yet, if he be wise, he will never attempt to make one single Person like him, besides those whom he absolutely needs for Associates: and even of such he will beware: for he hath *taught them an evil Lesson at first himself* \*. But spreading his Opinions farther, he will look on as the silliest of Vanities: and be earnestly desirous, that others should act upon Principle, whatever he doth himself: that his Friends should be faithful and affectionate, his Servants honest and careful, his Children dutiful and regular. And they, who, in the fancied Superiority of their Knowledge, teach those about them, or those with whom they converse, to be profligate;

\* Eccles i3. 1.

gate ; by expreffing, either designedly or carelefly, a Contempt of Virtue ; well deserve the Return, they often meet with, for fuch In-  
 ftructions.

Nay indeed every prudent Man, be his private Way of thinking ever fo bad, will be folicitous to preferve in the World, not only Morals ; but, for the fake of Morals, what is the main Support of them, Religion too : and that Religion, which is the likeliest to fupport them. Though he conceive it to be falfe, he will refpect it as beneficial. Were he to imagine this or that Part of it hurtful ; he would ftill moderate his Zeal againft them, fo as not to deftroy the Influence of the reft. For if believing fome Things may do Harm in the World, believing others may do Good. And if any Thing whatever can do much Good, and no Harm : it is the Perfuaſion, that we live continually under the Eye of an infinitely powerful and wife, juft and good Ruler ; who hath ſent us a Perſon of inconceivable Dignity, on Purpoſe to give us the fulleſt Assurance of his rewarding all, who ſhall repent and amend, and puniſhing all who continue in Wickedneſs, both here and to Eternity. To do or ſay what may weaken the  
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Impressions of such a Doctrine, must, on all Suppositions, be the grossest Folly. And yet some, who have the highest Opinion of their own Understandings, are perpetually guilty of it: and seem not to discern, how impossible it is, that the World should ever be influenced, to any good Purpose, by what the daily Conversation and Example of those, who are likely to be reckoned the more knowing Part of the World, encourage the rest to despise.

But I dwell too long on the Supposition that Men can be absolutely persuaded, that Religion and Virtue are Nothing. For though many have wished, and some said it, when the Wickedness of their Lives hath driven them to that Refuge: and though others may have been led, by Love of Singularity, or Indignation against reigning Superstitions, to advance the same Notion: yet neither their Numbers, nor their Abilities, have been comparatively at all considerable: and besides, few of them appear to have thoroughly convinced themselves, at least for any Time, of what they affirmed: nor is there Pretence of Ground for such Conviction to rest on. Doubts indeed may be raised, such as they are. And therefore let us consider, in the second Place, the  
Obliga-



Obligations of those, who are doubtful about these Matters. Now Uncertainty, as it implies an Apprehension, that they may not be true ; implies also an Apprehension, that they may. And the lowest Degree of Likelihood, the very Possibility, that God is, and that Virtue is his Law, should in all Reason have a powerful Influence on the Minds and Conduct of Men. Perhaps they fluctuate, only because they have not taken due Pains to inform themselves. They are ignorant ; not Religion and Morals destitute of Proof: and instead of flighting, they should study them. Or supposing, after some Inquiry, that they cannot determine: this happens in many Cases, where further Inquiry affords full Evidence ; concerning the main Point at least, if not every Particular. But were we to remain ever so much at a Loss, when we have done our best: not knowing Things to be true, is an exceedingly different State from knowing them to be false ; how apt soever we are to confound the one with the other. In the Affairs of this World, Men may be quite in Suspence about Matters, which yet are very important Realities : and it may be of the utmost Consequence to them, whether, during that Suspence,

pence, they act rightly or not: nay, while it is ever so uncertain, what they are to think; it may be very clear, how they are to behave: and, by following or transgressing that Rule, they may as truly deserve well or ill, as by any other Part of their Conduct. Why then may not the Case be the same, in Respect to those, who have not arrived at Certainty concerning religious and moral Obligations? Why may not such Doubts be one Part of the Trial of their Behaviour; as well as other Perplexities are of the Behaviour of other Persons?

Being profane and vicious, because they do not see clearly, is determining, instead of doubting: and determining on the Side, that is not only prejudicial to all around them, but dangerous to themselves. For it is exceedingly little, were all Things well considered, that we can almost ever get by Wickedness: but what we may suffer by it, is infinite. The Fruits of it in this Life are usually found very bitter: nor is there any Shadow of Proof, but another may succeed it. And if there should; Innocence here cannot possibly hurt us hereafter: but Guilt runs a double Risque; not only as uneasy Reflections naturally follow it, but as farther Punishment may be justly inflicted

on it. The slightest Sense of Duty, that we can experience, should have made us at least suspect, that so peculiar a Feeling as that, is not to stand for Nothing in our Composition. And if Men will do, what they are told, by a secret Voice within, they ought not; it is fit they should take the Consequences, in the next World, as well as the present. For it is knowing they did ill, not knowing they should be condemn'd for it, that makes their Condemnation just. And though acute and subtle Reasoners may easily build up a specious System of Doubts and Questions; yet this is a poor Defence to rest the Whole, of their Beings upon: especially as Men have so irresistible a Conviction, that Right and Wrong are Notions of great Consequence, when their own Rights are invaded; that they cannot in earnest think them idle Words, or Matters of Indifference, when their Neighbours are concerned; let them say what they will.

And therefore we may now go on to a third Supposition; that Men acknowledge the Obligation of Morals, but not of Religion; and let us consider, what they are to do. They almost universally take the Liberty of doing one very bold and wrong Thing, of most extensive bad Effect.

Effect: They model their Notions of Morals, just according to their own Fancy; and reduce them into as narrow a Compass, as they think convenient. So that, while they talk very highly of Virtue, they practise little or nothing of it: or, if they observe some Duties strictly, yet others, though, it may be, scarce of less Moment, but less agreeable to them, they neither regard, nor acknowledge, but hold them in utter Contempt. Thus one Part of the World transgresses the Rules of Sobriety and Chastity; another lives wholly to idle and expensive Amusements; a third is wickedly selfish or ill-natured in private Affairs; a fourth unreasonably vehement in public ones; and yet all contrive to overlook their own Faults in these Points, and admire their own Goodness in others: whereas to be truly good, we must be so in every Thing alike. But Inclination easily prevails over Principle, where it hath not the Sanction of Religion to strengthen it. And they, who profess Nothing beyond Morals, not only are destitute of that higher Aid, but, though their Lives fully shew how much they want it, very commonly affect a Scorn of it, no Way to be accounted for. Suppose them doubtful even

about natural Religion ; they must own, that, could it be proved, Nothing in the World could influence Men to Virtue, like it. The Fear of Punishment, the Hope of Reward, from the King and Lord of all, the Consciousness of living continually in his Presence, Reverence of his perfect Holiness, Love of his infinite Goodness, Reliance on his infinite Wisdom and Power, are evidently the strongest Motives to right Behaviour in every Station, that can be proposed. They must own too, that the most thoughtful and able Men in all Ages, have held these Motives to be well grounded ; that the Proofs in Favour of them have considerable Appearances of being conclusive : and, had they none, it would furnish no Cause of Triumph, but of the deepest Concern to every Lover of Virtue. Such a one therefore, however uncertain, will abhor the Thought of treating so beneficial, so respectable a Doctrine with Contempt and Ridicule : a shocking Manner, which frivolous and wrong Minds are strangely fond of, on many unfit Occasions : and indulging it, thoroughly misleads them from good Sense and discreet Conduct, in every other Article of Life, as well as this. On the contrary, the slightest Apprehension, that

that there only may be a just Ruler and Judge of the World, will give every well-disposed Person great Seriousness of Heart in thinking upon these Subjects, and great Decency in speaking of them : will incline him to seek for, and pay Regard to, any Degree of farther Evidence concerning them, that is real, though perhaps it falls very short of what he could wish : and will engage him, in the mean Time, to behave with all the Caution, that becomes his present Situation. For, in a Case of such Importance, even small Suspicions ought to lay us under no small Restraints. Therefore he will let Nothing ever escape him, which may induce others to throw off what he only doubts of : he will never solicit them to transgress the Precepts of Religion, while they acknowledge its Authority : (Things palpably wicked, and yet commonly done :) he will much more discourage a groundless Neglect, than a groundless Belief and Practice, of it : and he will think himself bound to act thus, not in Prudence only, as even Men of no Principle are, but in Conscience also.

These then are the Duties of such, if any such there be, as admit the Reality of Virtue, and are doubtful concerning any Thing farther.

But indeed the Generality of Men profess to go so much farther, as to believe in natural Religion, whatever they may think of Christianity. Let us therefore consider, in the fourth Place, what their Obligations are. And we shall find an Addition of very considerable ones incumbent on them, if they deserve the Title they assume, that of Deists: in which Word, according to its original Import, Regard to the Deity is principally, if not solely, expressed. But notwithstanding this, it hath now for a long Time signified much more determinately, that Men do not believe in Christ, than that they do believe in God. At least, the Belief of some, who would take it exceedingly ill to be called by a worse Name, amounts to little more, than a general confused Persuasion of some Sort of first Cause; probably an intelligent, perhaps a beneficent one too: but with scarce any distinct Conception of his being the moral Governor of the World; much less any serious Conviction, that he expects from us a Temper and Conduct of Piety and Virtue, as the only Condition and Means of our obtaining Happiness and avoiding Misery. Now if their Faith comes short of this, they may very nearly as well have none at all: and if it comes up to this,

this, it binds them indispensably to be very different in their Practice, from what they too commonly are: to cultivate in their Hearts that Fear and Love, which the Greatness and the Goodness of God require: to pay him outwardly that Homage and Worship, which our compound Frame and the Interests of Society call for: to beg of him both Light to discern Truth, and Strength to practise it: to make diligent and upright Inquiry, what Rules he hath pointed out for the Conduct of Man: to observe them all with the strictest Care, however contrary to favourite Inclinations: and to endeavour, as far as their Influence reaches, that others also may feel and express the same deep Sense of what they owe their Maker. These are evident Duties of real Believers in him: do they perform them? They talk in the highest Terms of the Sufficiency of Reason, and the Clearness with which natural Light teaches every Thing needful: doth it *teach them to live soberly, righteously and godly* ? It is but too easy for them to excell, in this Respect, the Generality of such, as claim the Title of Christians. Why will they not take so honourable a Method of putting us, and our



Profession, out of Countenance ? They apprehend themselves perhaps to have been far more strict and careful than we, in forming their Opinions: why will they not manifest a proportionable Strictness in regulating their Practice too ? That would be a powerful Evidence, both to the World and their own Hearts, that they are sincere in their Pretensions: that they do not reject the Doctrines of the Gospel, merely to be excused from the Duties of it: nor disown every other Law of Life, but one within them, that they may be tied to Nothing, which they do not like. It would be uncharitable indeed to accuse them of this, without Proof: but they would do well to examine, whether they are not guilty of it. For it is a dangerous Temptation: and one Thing looks peculiarly suspicious in many of them; that they have so little or no Zeal for natural Religion, and so vehement a Zeal against revealed. Surely every one, who inwardly honours God, must be affected quite otherwise: and think both his Conscience, and his Character concerned in shewing the warmest Attachment to the former, and the mildest Equity in Relation to the latter. If he not only suspected, but imagined he knew the Scripture-Scheme to be

be false, still he must own it to be a Falsehood with the most amazing Quantity of Truth in it, that ever was: to give Men, however it happens, beyond Comparifon, the rightest Notions, the juſteſt Precepts, the joyfulleſt Encouragement, both in Piety and Morals, that ever System did: and to have been *the Light of the World*\*, ſo far as appears, from the very Beginning of it. Our only Knowledge of the Exiſtence of true Religion in the earlieſt Times, is from the Discoveries recorded in the Bible, as made to the Patriarchs. The Jewish Diſpenſation afterwards was for many Ages the main Bulwark of Faith in *one God, the Maker of Heaven and Earth*: nor probably was it from any other Source, that the learned Heathens derived their chief Acquaintance with divine Truths, after they had forgotten the primitive Tradition of them. Then laſtly, the Chriſtian Revelation overturned, when every Thing elſe had appeared incapable of doing it, Polytheiſm and Idolatry, immoral Superſtition and profligate Vice, wherever it was preached: and though it was indeed perverted for a Time to patronize, in ſome Degree, what it had deſtroyed, yet, by the native

\* John viii. 12.

Goodness of its Constitution, it recovered again ; and is now professed by the Church, of which we are Members, in greater Purity, than elsewhere upon Earth, Infidels themselves being Judges. If therefore they have in Truth the Affection, which they cannot deny but they ought to have, for genuine, moral, rational Piety, they must honour this Institution, as an infinitely beneficial one ; whether they confess it to be from Heaven, or not : and, before they even wish it disregarded, should consider, with no little Seriousness, what Effects must naturally follow. Would Men really believe the Being and Providence of God, the Obligations of Virtue, and the Recompences of another Life, the more firmly, for disbelieving the Gospel ? Would they understand their Duty the better, for having no written Rule of it ? Would they judge about it the more impartially for being left to make it out by their own Fancies ? Would they think of it the oftener, for never being instructed in it ? Or is there not the strongest Appearance, that as from Christianity all the true Knowledge of Religion came, which even the Enemies of Christianity have to boast of : so with 'it, all true Regard to Religion would  
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be lost again? We have been making in the present Age some Trial of this: and the Effects, in private Life and public, have been such, that it is very hard to say, why either a good or a wise Man should ever want to see, what a farther Trial would end in. But, at least, such a one would have much more Concern that Men should believe and practise what Reason and Nature teach, than that they should not believe and practise what Revelation teaches. And even if he could think himself obliged to declare against the latter, be the Consequences bad as they will, for the Sake of what he imagines Truth; (which yet Unbelievers are not apt to consider as a Point of such indispensable Obligation, in other Cases;) he would however do it in a fair, an honourable, a decent Manner: never misrepresent, through Design or Negligence, the Doctrines, the Evidence, or the Teachers, of the Gospel; never study to expose them to the Hatred of Men by Invectives, or to their Contempt by Ridicule: but inform himself about them with Care, judge of them with Candour, and speak of them with good Breeding and Moderation. Widely different from this is the Conduct of our Adversaries; who take all  
Methods

Methods without Scruple to engage on their Side, the Resentments of some, the Avarice of others, the Vanity of a third Sort, the Sensuality of a fourth : and notwithstanding, are able, it seems, to pass themselves upon unwary Minds for great Lovers of free Inquiry : but, with a little Attention, *by their Fruits ye shall know them* <sup>d</sup>. Would God they were cool and serious enough to know themselves ; and to remember, that neither Doubt nor Disbelief can ever excuse Malice or Dishonesty. Could they but bring their Hearts into such a Disposition, their Objections would soon diminish, and our Answers and Arguments appear just and conclusive. To be satisfied of this, let us take a short View of the Case of Christianity.

God may certainly inform Men of most useful Things, which they did not, and could not, else know. He may certainly bestow superior Advantages on some Ages and Nations from Motives of which we are ignorant, yet be sufficiently gracious to all. He may see Cause to reveal some Things to us very imperfectly, and yet require us to believe what he hath revealed, though we are unable to comprehend what he hath not. He may give

<sup>d</sup> Matth. vii, 16.

us Commands, with adding the Reasons of them, which yet we are bound to obey: for we ourselves do the same Thing. He may appoint various Forms of Religion, suited to various Places and Times, full as properly as Men appoint various Forms of Government. Farther still, he might as justly permit us to become what we are, frail and mortal, by Means of our first Parents Transgression, as create us what we are, independently upon it. He is no less merciful in pardoning our Sins on Account of the willing Sacrifice, which he hath provided for us, than if he had pardoned them without any at all. He is no less authorized to demand of us what he will give us Power to perform, if we ask it aright; than what we had Power to perform of ourselves. And he can as easily form our Bodies anew, fitted for the Purposes of a better Life, as he could form them originally, fitted for the Purposes of this. If some Parts of his Word appear hard to be understood, of small Use, or even hurtful; many Parts of his Works appear so too. If the Revelation, which he hath given us, hath often done Harm instead of Good: the Reason and the Affections which he hath given us, have done so likewise.

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These few Considerations, (and there are many obvious ones besides, of the same Kind,) would remove out of every honest Mind most of the Prejudices raised against the Faith of Christians: which indeed, for the greatest Part, bear full as hard against the universal Providence of God, even against those Proceedings of it, which we daily experience.

Then as to the Evidence in Favour of our Religion: whatever Difficulties may be started concerning particular Points of it, taken singly; as there may, in the same Manner, concerning any Evidence in the World; yet lay together, in one View, the Scripture-Narration of Things from the Beginning; the Consistency and Connection of the Scheme, though carried on for, so many thousands of Years; the admirable Temper and Character of the Author of Christianity; the Sublimity and Reasonableness of its Doctrines; the Purity and Benevolence of its Precepts; the Excellency of its Means of Improvement and Grace; the eternal and true Felicity of its Rewards; the manifold Attestations of its History and Miracles; the wonderful Propagation of it through the World, and its primitive Influence on the Souls and Lives of Men; the undeniable

deniable Completion of many of its Prophecies, and the evident Room there is left for the fulfilling of the rest : all these notorious Facts, thus united and combined, can surely never fail to convince every impartial Examiner, that the System, they support, must be from God, and that the supreme Happiness of Man is to share in its Blessings. Now the weakest Degree of such a Persuasion, far from being unworthy of Regard, because it is no stronger, ought in all Justice to produce a most inquisitive Attention to further Proof ; and, in the mean Time, a conscientious Practice of what already appears credible. For, though any one's Belief exceed his Doubts but a little ; yet, if it doth so at all, what prevails in his Mind ought to regulate his Conduct : and acting thus, he will soon experience his Faith to increase. Setting himself to keep the Commandments, will shew him clearly his Want of the Mercies acknowledged in the Creed : and labouring to behave suitably to his present Light, will intitle him to that gracious Promise of more, given by our blessed Lord : *If any Man will do his Will, he shall know of the Doctrine, whether it be of God\*.*

\* John vii. 17.

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The further and particular Obligations of those, who have acquired this Knowledge, and are established in the Gospel-Faith, must be the Subject of another Discourse. But the general Direction for such as are weak and less advanced, is undoubtedly that of the Apostle: *Whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same Rule, let us mind the same Thing: and, if in any Thing ye be otherwise minded, God will reveal even this unto you* <sup>†</sup>.

<sup>†</sup> Phil. iii. 16, 15.

## S E R M O N III.

I THESS. V. 21, 22.

*Prove all Things: hold fast that which is good:  
abstain from all Appearance of Evil.*

**I**N discoursing on these Words, I have laid before you the Duty of carefully considering our Obligations, in Respect of Piety and Morals: and acting suitably to our Convictions, on those Heads. According as our Notions of either vary, whether from our different Means of Knowledge, or different Use of them, it must be expected, that our Conduct should vary too. And yet I have shewn you, that, were it possible for Men to disbelieve the Authority both of Religion and Virtue, mere Prudence and Self-interest would put them under considerable Restraints, in Relation to each: that whoever only doubts concerning them, admits they may be true; and therefore should take the acknowledged safer Side: that

any Degree of Persuasion, in Favour of Virtue only, much more of natural Religion too, should excite a proportionably serious Regard to it: and that the lowest Apprehension of the Truth of Christianity, (which, I hope I proved to you, though briefly, hath the clearest Marks of Truth upon it) greatly strengthens every other Tie; and farther binds Men to inform themselves fully about it, as soon as possible; and give it respectful Treatment in the mean Time.

If then even these Persons are to behave thus, how are we to behave? The Doubter, nay the Infidel, is obliged to no small Care of his Heart and Life: what is the Believer obliged to? We pride ourselves on being such: pity or detest those who are not: and yet, all the while, Christians who think and act otherwise than Christians ought, may deserve full as ill, perhaps much worse, than they: indeed may be one chief Cause, that they are what they are. Leaving others therefore to the Judge of all; let us at present think of ourselves: consider, what Manner of Persons our holy Profession requires us to be; and whether we so observe its Rules, that we may justly hope to attain its End: escape *the Wrath*

*Wrath to come<sup>a</sup>, and partake of the Glory that shall be revealed<sup>b</sup>.* Now it plainly requires,

I. That we be duly affected by the peculiar Doctrines of Christianity. Many that profess it, and are persuaded of its Authority, seem to have no Notion almost of its Value, or of any great Regard owing to it. They say, it is designed intirely to make Men live good Lives: and accordingly if they do but live what the World calls a good Life, the Design is answered. As for Matters of mere Faith, or even of Practice beyond this, they conceive there is little Need of being concerned about them: and thus they are very good Christians in their own Opinions, with scarce any Thing to distinguish them from good, or perhaps even from indifferent, Heathens. In this Error, the artful Enemies of the Gospel studiously confirm its inconsiderate Friends. For thus, pretending by no Means to oppose it, but only to rectify Mens Notions about it; and making loud Complaints, if they are suspected of any Thing worse; they can destroy, where they gain Credit, the whole Effect of what it adds to the Religion of Nature: and induce the unwary to imagine, there is Nothing in

<sup>a</sup> Matth. iii. 7. Luke iii. 7.

<sup>b</sup> 1 Pet. v. 1.

it, worth contending for, besides *those practical, social, and real Duties*, as they are pleased, by Way of Distinction, to call them, *which our Reason and Senses prescribe in common to us all*; and which therefore we may learn and observe as well without, as with the Bible; where they lie mixed with many other Things, useless, if not hurtful; and are either misrepresented by the Writers themselves, or very liable to be mistaken by us. But indeed, if the very Writers of Scripture, with the Spirit of God to assist them, misunderstood the Doctrines of Revelation; he both chose and guided them extremely ill; nor have we any possible Means of understanding those Doctrines now. And if either they or we understand them at all; our Maker expects from us the Belief of many Things undiscoverable by Reason, as Points of great Consequence to our eternal Well-being; as with good Cause he may. The Knowledge of our fallen Estate shews us our original Destination, and our present Need of Help from above. The Incarnation and Death of God's eternal Son could not be appointed by him for Purposes of small Importance: and his Word acquaints us, that Blessings of the highest Importance depend on what he hath  
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done and suffered for us : on his Atonement and Mediation, our Title to Pardon of Sin ; on the Grace of the Holy Ghost whom he sent, our Ability of performing acceptable Obedience ; on both, our Resurrection to eternal Life ; on our Belief of these Things, our Interest in them. If then the Gospel be true, its peculiar Doctrines are of the utmost Moment : and the Duties grounded on them, which we owe to God, as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ ; to his Son, as our Redeemer ; to his blessed Spirit, as our Sanctifier ; are both as real, and as weighty, as any possibly can be ; fully equal in their Obligation, and superior in their Rank, to the most valuable ones of human Society. They therefore who neglect them, lead very wicked, instead of good Lives : and they who esteem them lowly, dishonour the Author of them. It is true, Reason cannot prove them : but it doth not contradict them. They are taught in Scripture only : but they are taught there by the all-wise God : and he cannot have left us at Liberty to model his Revelations according to our own Fancies ; admit Part, and reject Part : but we are to take the whole Plan of our Salvation, as he hath delivered it : believe it, though implicitly ; and respect it, in

Proportion to the Strefs laid upon it by him, whomust know. This will naturally dispose us,

2. To perform the next Obligation incumbent on us : paying a due Regard to the peculiar Institutions of Christianity. Great Numbers appear to have some how persuaded themselves, that several Things, which they must acknowledge their Maker hath appointed, as the ordinary Means of heavenly Grace and spiritual Improvement, may notwithstanding, nearly, if not quite, as well, be let alone. Baptism indeed they do practise : but with plain Marks of considering it, as a mere empty Ceremony; not, as our Saviour hath declared it\*, the express and original Condition of our Claim to all the Mercies of the Gospel-Covenant. Laying on of Hands in Confirmation, after proper Instruction and a personal Engagement to live piously and virtuously, though evidently a very affecting and useful Rite, and reckoned, in the Epistle to the *Hebrews*, amongst *the Principles of the Doctrine of Christ*†; is yet desired, in Proportion, but by few. Receiving the holy Eucharist, though a Duty of all Christians, enjoined by our blessed Redeemer, almost with his dying Words, and de-

\* Mark xvi. 16. John iii. 5.

† Heb. vi. 1, 2.

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clared by St. *Paul* to be *the Communion of his Body and Blood*<sup>c</sup>, that is, a Participation of the Benefits of his Death; is yet, I fear, entirely omitted by most, practised by many of the rest, very seldom; and by some, from very improper Motives: and such Reasons are pleaded for the Neglect, as have either no Weight at all, or equal Weight against the Hope of future Happiness. Praying to God is a Dictate of natural, as well as revealed Religion: And yet were a great Part of you here present questioned, how constantly you pray in private, indeed when you prayed last, and whether you are careful to do it with Attention and Seriousness, or look on it only as a Matter of Course; what Answer must you give? And as for public Worship: how many are there, who yet call themselves Christians, that hardly ever attend it? And how do many others think and speak of it? Perhaps as Matter of Curiosity and Amusement. If they can hope for an entertaining Discourse after it, they will condescend to come and do Homage to him, that made them, or seem to do it: otherwise they will not. Or perhaps they vouchsafe to attend it as Matter of decent Example and Propriety.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. x. 16.



Accordingly in some Places they always go to Church; in others, never: forgetting, that the latter will be known, and will influence, full as much as the former. Or the least Trifle in the World shall determine them, sometimes the one Way, sometimes the other. And both doing and omitting it they talk of, in an easy, gay Manner, as a Thing of no Consequence at all. Nay, too often, it is directly pleaded, that they can spend their Time as well, or much better, another Way: for they know beforehand every Thing that is told them here. Now, not to inquire particularly, in what better Things, that they could not find Leisure for else, those Persons actually spend the Time of divine Service, who tell us so frankly they can: possibly they may, some of them, a little over-rate their Knowledge: at least, they frequently seem to have great Need of being reminded, if not taught: and had they none, another and higher Duty, for which we meet, is Prayer. But to this, and all other Acts of Devotion, they object, that true Devotion is in the Heart; and outward Shew is Nothing material. Why, so is true Loyalty, true Friendship, every true Virtue. But are we therefore bound to give no external Demonstration of them?

them? At that Rate, what would they be worth, and how long would they last? God indeed doth not want such Demonstrations: but we want them, to keep alive our Sense of Duty to him: the World around us wants them, to spread a like Sense amongst others: and, were the Benefits of his Institutions much less evident than they are; still they are his, and we may be sure he hath Reason for them. A good Subject will go beyond, rather than come short of, what the Laws require, in paying Honour to his Prince. A penitent Criminal will not fail to sue out and plead his Pardon in due Form, let Forms, in themselves, be Things ever so insignificant: if he did, purposely or negligently, he would well deserve to forfeit it. Every Man of common Prudence, on whom, or his Family, any Thing valuable is bestowed on certain Conditions, will think it of Consequence, to qualify himself, or them, according to those Conditions, whether he sees the particular Use of them or not. If then we think such Behaviour necessary in all temporal Concerns, why not in spiritual? God is our King, and hath prescribed to us the Manner of doing him Homage. He is our Judge, and hath directed us to the Method

thod of escaping Punishment. He is our gracious Benefactor, and hath notified to us the Means of obtaining his Favours. Why shall any one Thing, thus ordered by him, and therefore undoubtedly ordered in Wisdom, be either omitted, or observed with Contempt? Surely this is by no Means the Spirit, with which Sinners ought to receive a Tender of Forgiveness; and Mortals, of eternal Life. The Epistle to the *Hebrews* directs the first Christians, even in the Midst of Persecution, *not to forsake the assembling of themselves together*, which comprehends every public Office of Religion; and laments, that *the Manner of some was to do otherwise*<sup>f</sup>. How guilty then must they be, who are now of this Number; or put on the Appearance of despising the Ordinances of Christ, at the same Time that they use them; and, though really, to some Degree, serious in them, are afraid of being thought so! But this leads me,

3. To a farther Obligation we are under, which is to profess our Regard, both for the Doctrines and the Institutions of the Gospel, openly and boldly, on all fit Occasions. It is a Reproach, I believe, peculiar to the Christians

<sup>f</sup> Heb. x. 25.

of this Age and Nation, that many of them seem ashamed of their Christianity: would not perhaps be said to have thrown it aside, yet would by no Means be imagined much in earnest about it: and therefore study, if possible, to conceal their Way of thinking: or, when they are attacked upon it, excuse their Piety, as others do their Vices, with a Sort of laughing half Defence; and shift off the Subject, as well and as soon as they can. A most astonishing Treatment of what our eternal Happiness depends on: especially when our Saviour expressly requires us to *confess him before Men*, as ever we expect, that he should *confess us before his Father, which is in Heaven*<sup>s</sup>. It is not meant, that we should be affectedly forward in talking of our Religion; but, whenever we are called to do so, unaffectedly own it, and stand by it. In such a Case, Dissimulation, or even Reserve, is a mean-spirited Desertion of the worthiest Cause in the World: and the Words of the holy Jesus on another Occasion are justly applicable to this, that *he, who is not for him, is against him*<sup>h</sup>. Whoever is unwilling to be taken for a pious and good Man, runs a great Risque of soon becoming a

<sup>s</sup> Matt. x. 32.<sup>h</sup> Matth. xii. 30. Luke xi. 23.

profane and bad one. Open Profession would have restrained him from doing wrong, and others from tempting him: whereas a timorous Concealment exposes him both Ways. At least, it gives the irreligious a Pretence for saying and imagining, either that every one thinks as they do, or that no one can defend thinking otherwise: and deprives those, who are better disposed, of a very animating and needful Support. For no Inticement to neglect our Duty is so dangerous, as the Appearance of a general Neglect: nor any Persecution so effectual, as that of public Scorn. Therefore we should combine to shelter one another from it: declare frankly and with Spirit, in our private Conversation, as well as by our Attendance here, what Side we are of: not be afraid of a little, perhaps only seeming, Contempt from those; who are the justest Objects of Pity themselves; but be willing *to suffer the Affliction* of Shame, amongst others, if it must be so, *with the People of God*<sup>1</sup>: the Number of whom is not yet become so small, or so destitute of able Advocates, but that, would they unite for that End, they might abundantly keep each other in Countenance, and their

<sup>1</sup> Heb. xi. 25.

Adversaries in Ave. We have every possible Reason to be zealous in our Cause. Unbelievers have no single good one to be so in theirs. Yet they are active, and we are remiss: and what will this end in, unless we change our Conduct? But then if we do, there is a

4th, Most important Obligation incumbent on us, that of tempering our Zeal with Mildness and Charity. We ought indeed to *contend earnestly for the Faith*\*, whenever it is opposed: but in a Manner worthy of it. Cruel Actions, opprobrious Words, inward ill Will, unjust bad Opinion, are absolutely forbidden us, even towards the Enemies of the Gospel: and upon the Whole, we do treat them with a Moderation, which they are far from imitating. But still more gentle should we be to such, as believe Christianity, but only misunderstand it: especially considering, that we are just as liable to mistake, as they. And it is a melancholy Consideration, that whilst one Part of those, who profess our Religion, are so cool about its general and essential Interests; most of the other are so immoderately warm about their own particular Systems and Persuasions. Not only the Maintainers of established Opinions are apt to judge hardly of

\* Jude 3.

the rigid Opposers of them, and they to return it: but many, of greater Latitude, cry out for Liberty to themselves, though they enjoy it to the full, with a Spirit of Persecution: and whilst they claim an unbounded Allowance for every new Notion, will give none to those, who retain the old; but throw Imputations or Contempt upon them, without Equity or Mercy. What can be the Consequence of this, but what we experience: that the bitter Things which we say of one another, Unbelievers, with seemingly good Reason, will say after us: and when we have taught them to condemn the several Sorts of Christians, and especially their Teachers, as the worst of Men, will, by a very plausible Inference, condemn Christianity, as the worst of Religions? How zealously soever therefore contending Parties may *boldly* profess what they profess: yet, violating the most indisputable Duties by their Vehemence for disputable Doctrines, they provoke great Numbers to sit loose to all Profession; and do incredible Harm to the Religion, which they would serve. For, let us try what Methods we will, Nothing can ever so effectually promote true Faith, as joining to practise true Charity. But however unanimous Christians may be in other Respects, they will neither  
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do Honour to the Gospel, nor receive Benefit from it, unless they are also careful,

5. To be seriously and uniformly pious and virtuous. Yet, most unhappily, whatever else we differ in, we agree but too well in neglecting this. Multitudes call themselves Christians, who seem never to have thought of any Care of their Conduct; but make a solemn Profession of the purest and holiest Religion, that ever was; and at the same Time, throughout their Lives, do every Thing that they are inclined to, and Nothing else. Others that will observe some Restraints, would find, upon a fair Examination, that they follow their Passions, perhaps in as many or more Cases, than their Principles; or, which comes to the same Thing, accommodate their Principles to suit their Passions. And even they, who have little of any bad Inclination to lead them wrong, are very frequently led almost as wrong by indolent Compliance with bad Custom. For from whence is it, that the Generality of Men form their Rule of Behaviour? Not from Scripture, or from Reason: but from Fashion and common Practice: whatever they find People of tolerable Reputation do, that they do likewise. When a farther Step of wrong Indulgence is publicly taken, they proceed



ceed to take the same; or, it may be, one somewhat less: the Duties, which others throw off intirely, they practise rarely, and with Indifference: the Liberties, which others indulge without Reserve, they approach towards with Hesitation and by Degrees: but as the World goes on from bad to worse, they go on too; and imagine they are perfectly safe, because they are a little behind. Now Men should not indeed be superstitiously scrupulous: but they should be conscientiously attentive to their Hearts and Lives; and reflect what ought to be done, as well as observe what is done. The Gospel forbids, instead of recommending, *Conformity to the World*<sup>1</sup>: by no Means with an Intention, that we should be singular in Matters of Indifference, but resolute against Compliances unlawful or dangerous. Christians, far from being permitted to follow others into Sin, are designed to lead them into Piety and Virtue: to be *the Light, the Salt of the Earth*<sup>2</sup>: not to set an Example of useless Rigour, much less of uncharitable Censoriousness; but of punctual and impartial Adherence to every Rule, which God hath appointed by Reason or Scripture, and faithful Endeavours to attain the great End of his Appoint-

<sup>1</sup> Rom xii. 2.<sup>2</sup> Matth. v. 13, 14.

inents : for without that, the exactest outward Regularity is empty Form. *Now the End of the Commandment is Charity, out of a pure Heart and of a good Conscience, and of Faith unfeigned<sup>n</sup> : a sincere Spirit of Love and Reverence towards our Maker, our Redeemer and Sanctifier ; of Justice and Goodness to our Fellow-Creatures, of Reasonableness and Moderation, with Respect to the Advantages and Enjoyments of the present Life ; for in these Things consists our Fitness for a better. This then is the real Temper of Christianity. And if we have either never felt it, or perceive ourselves declining and deviating from it ; our Hearts growing fond of worldly Objects, and sinking down into that supine Disregard to God and our Duty, and a Judgement to come, which is undeniably the prevailing, and likely to be the fatal, Distemper of the present Age : our Case and our Remedy are plainly laid down in that awful Exhortation to the Church of Sardis : *I know thy Works : that thou hast a Name that thou livest, and art dead. Be watchful ; and strengthen the Things which remain, that are ready to die.—Remember, how thou hast received and heard ; and hold fast, and repent. If thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a Thief ;**

<sup>n</sup> 1 Tim. i. 5.

*and thou shalt not know what Hour I will come upon thee*°. But then to do this effectually, we must obey the whole Injunction of the Text: and not only *hold fast that which is evidently good*, but,

6. and lastly, *Abstain from all Appearance of Evil*. It might be translated, from every Kind of Evil. But even then, the Sense would be much the same. For though doing what we know to be wrong is a grosser Kind of Wickedness: yet doing what appears to us wrong, though we are not sure of it, is a real Kind: and even were we absolutely doubtful, still, if taking one Course may be acting amiss, and taking the contrary cannot; the general Rule certainly is, to lean always towards the safer Side: for why should we run into Danger needlessly? And yet what Numbers of miserable Creatures are there, whom the Observance of this one Direction would have made happy: who saw the safe Path, but would prefer the pleasing one; exulted in it for a while, then were ensnared of a sudden, and lost perhaps for ever! Nor is it Pleasure only, but Interest, Power, Vanity, Resentment, every Thing within us and around us, in its Turn, that may endanger our Innocence, by

• Rev. iii. 1, 2, 3.

tempting us to venture upon what we hope, but are not satisfied, is lawful. *Go not therefore in a Way, wherein thou mayest fall: be not confident in a plain Way*<sup>p</sup>. Even such Actions, as appear to us very allowable, yet, if they appear evil to others, it is, ordinarily speaking, both our Prudence and our Duty to abstain from, as much as, with tolerable Convenience, we can. Whatever indeed, on mature Consideration, we are fully persuaded we ought to do, that we must do, let the World think as it will. But where we apprehend a Thing to be only permitted: if the wise will disapprove it, or the injudicious misinterpret it; if the good will be afflicted, or the bad rejoice at it; if rigid and warm Tempers will be guilty of censuring us for it rashly; or easy and complying ones follow us in it, against their Judgements; if our taking harmless Liberties will encourage others to take sinful ones: in short, if any how, by doing what otherwise we might, we shall induce any one else to do what he ought not: the great Law of Christian Charity requires, *that no Man put a Stumbling-block, or Occasion to fall, in his Brother's Way*; or do any Thing, whereby he is grieved, or offended,

<sup>p</sup> Ecclus. xxxii. 20, 21.

*or made weak*<sup>1</sup>. Shewing this tender Care neither to intice nor provoke a single Person, if it can be avoided, into Sin of whatever Sort, but to *please our Neighbour for his Good, to Edification*<sup>2</sup>, is a Precept, I believe, peculiar to the Gospel: or at least hath so peculiar a Stress laid on it there, as to distinguish our Religion, greatly to its Honour, from every other Institution of Life, that the World hath known.

After such an Addition to all the rest, there cannot be a completer Provision imagined, by Rules of Behaviour, for the Virtue, the Peace, the eternal Felicity of Mankind. And therefore Nothing remains, but what must depend on ourselves; that, having the best and fullest Directions, the noblest Promises, the most gracious Helps, we think seriously, while it is Time, what Use we ought to make, and what we do make, of these Advantages. The Word of God will shew us the first: our own Consciences, if honestly consulted, will tell us the latter. Happy are they in the highest Degree, who can stand the Comparison of the two: and happy they, in the next Place, whom a deep Sense, that at present they cannot, excites effectually to earnest Supplications, and faithful

<sup>1</sup> Rom. xiv. 13, 15, 21.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. xv. 2.

Endeavours, that they soon may. I conclude therefore with the Words following my Text. *The very God of Peace sanctify you wholly: and I pray God your whole Spirit, and Soul and Body, be preserved blameless unto the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

1 Theff. v. 23.



## S E R M O N IV.

LUKE xii. 57.

*Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not  
what is right?*

**T**HE Duties, which God hath enjoined us, though reasonable and beneficial in the highest Degree, are yet, through the Depravity of human Nature, and the Prevalence of bad Customs, become so unacceptable, that they are practised, as we must be sensible, but imperfectly by the best, and very little by the largest Part of the World. Yet avowedly to neglect doing what they ought, is too shocking a Behaviour to sit easy upon the Minds of Men. Some Plea therefore they must find out, either to justify, or at least to excuse, their Manner of Life. And various are, and ever have been, the Excuses, invented by the irreligious and immoral, not only to maintain



some Character amongst others, but chiefly to quiet themselves.

Now of all these, one of the best, if it were a true one, would be that of Ignorance: not knowing that such and such Things are incumbent on us. This appears to be a Case, to which not only Compassion must have Regard, but which even Justice itself must acquit of Guilt. And therefore it is no Wonder, if many shelter themselves under so favourable a Pretence,

The lower Part of Mankind, in general, on almost every Occasion, alledge, that they have not the Advantages of Education and Instruction which others have: that they are not able, perhaps even to read that holy Book, in which their Duty is set forth: and if they be, yet the same Quickness to understand it, or Leisure to study it, cannot be looked for from them, as if their Minds had been improved by Rules of reasoning and judging, and their Time at their own Disposal. A great deal they think may be required, with the utmost Reason, from those of higher Rank: but from such as they are, little or nothing.

But, besides this vulgar Sort, there is also a learned Kind of Ignorance, pleaded by some, whose

whose Freedom of Inquiry and superior Sagacity hath given them Cause, they apprehend, to be very diffident of many Points, that others are firmly persuaded of. And therefore they argue, that, though it may be the Duty of common People, who, for Want of the Means of Knowledge or of Abilities to use them, must believe what they are taught; though it may be right and necessary for them, in Consequence of their Belief, to practise Virtue and Piety very conscientiously: yet it must not be expected, that those of greater Genius, who are more enlightened, and perceive many Doubts in these Matters, should put themselves under disagreeable Restraints, merely on Account of uncertain Speculations; and conform their Lives to the rigid Precepts of Christianity, when they are really not well satisfied of the Authority of it; nor, it may be, even of natural Religion.

Thus, you see, the lowest Incapacity and the highest Self-opinion can urge in Effect the same Argument, to evade what Men have no Mind to. And I shall now shew, that in both it is inconclusive; and fully confuted by our Saviour's home Question, *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

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These Words appear, by the parallel Places in the other Evangelists, to have been originally designed against those amongst the *Jews*, who, from Dislike of the Strictness of our blessed Lord's Morality, pretended Ignorance of his divine Mission, after he had given abundant Proofs of it; when yet, without any separate Proofs of it at all, the main Things which he taught, carried their own Evidence along with them, and every Man's Heart bore Witness to their Truth. They had seen Miracles, of various Kinds, performed in Attestation of his Claim: yet still they were not content without more, and those of their own chusing. *The Pharisees came forth, with the Sadducees also, tempting him, and sought of him a Sign from Heaven<sup>a</sup>.* But he, with no less Dignity than Prudence, refused to gratify a Curiosity, both ill-meaning and endless: and *sighing deeply in his Spirit*, as St. Mark informs us<sup>b</sup>, at this perverse Disposition of theirs; told them, with a kind, because needful, Severity of Speech, where the Defect lay. *A wicked and adulterous Generation seeketh after a Sign<sup>c</sup>:* your sinful Inclinations and Lives, not the Want or the Desire of sufficient Evidence,

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. <sup>b</sup> Verse 12. <sup>c</sup> Matth. xvi. 4.

prompt you to this Demand : and *verily I say unto you, there shall be no Sign given, no such visible Manifestation of divine Glory as you insolently require, vouchsafed to this Generation<sup>d</sup>: nor is it requisite. When ye see a Cloud rise out of the West, straightway ye say, there cometh a Shower, and so it is. And when ye see the South Wind blow, ye say, there will be Heat, and it cometh to pass. Ye Hypocrites, ye can discern the Face of the Sky and of the Earth : but how is it that ye do not discern this Time<sup>e</sup> ? That is : on other Occasions you appear very able to judge of Things by the proper Indications of them. How can you then, with any Colour of Sincerity, pretend, that amidst so many Prophecies fulfilled, and so many Miracles performed, you have not, after all, sufficient Conviction, that this is the Season when the Messiah should appear, and that I am He? Nay, as to the principal Part of my Doctrine, which is the real Cause of your Antipathy to the Whole; as to the great Precepts of pure Religion and uniform Virtue, and your Need of Repentance and Faith in God's Mercy ; what Occasion is there for any farther Demonstrations of them, than your own Hearts, if honestly*

<sup>d</sup> Mark viii. 12.<sup>e</sup> Luke xii. 54, 55, 56.

consulted, will not fail to afford? *Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*

Now this Method of reasoning is equally applicable to Unbelievers and Cavillers in all Ages. It is in vain for them, to invent new Difficulties, or magnify old ones, concerning the Authority of our Religion; while the Reason of Things, the Truth of Facts, and the Nature of God and Man, continue to exhibit so full Proof of those fundamental Articles of it, the eternal Obligation of moral Duties, the Sinfulness of every one's Nature and Life, the Necessity of Repentance, and humble Application for Pardon and Grace. And, since the true Quarrel of such Persons is against these Doctrines, and these cannot be shaken: they had much better reconcile themselves to the Whole, than make fruitless Attacks upon one Part; in which if they were to succeed, (as they never will) they would, in Point of Argument, be almost as far from their favourite Scheme, of Liberty to do what they please, and think highly of themselves notwithstanding, as they were before. Suppose there are some Doctrines, against which they can find more Objections, than their Neighbours: there are surely others, of which they can discern more clearly the certain

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tain Grounds. If not, they have employed their imagined superior Faculties to very ill Purpose. Or, were they to doubt of ever so many Points; yet, if they take Pains for it, and force themselves to doubt, hunting every Way for Difficulties, asking for no Solutions, and turning a deaf Ear to them when offered; they have no more Excuse for any Part of their consequent wrong Behaviour, than if they had no Doubts at all. For the Whole of their Case is: they perplex Things on Purpose, in order to complain that they are not clear: walk with their Eyes wilfully shut, and then insist, that they cannot be blamed, if they stumble; for it is quite dark, and they do not see a Step of their Way.

But let us now proceed to those, who acknowledge themselves, as many of the former would, if they had more Modesty, the less knowing Part of Mankind. Some of these profess a second-hand Sort of Scepticism; built not so much on their own Judgment, as that of their admired Leaders just mentioned. But since the Masters are indefensible, their implicit Disciples must be yet more so. For, if the Question is to be decided by the Authority of Men of Letters and Abilities, the greatest Number and most eminent, beyond  
all

all Comparifon, have confefledly been always on the Side of Religion : even excluding the Clergy, as interefled in the Cafe: which, however, is by no Means thought a fufficient Reafon, in other Profeflions, why Men of known Skill and Probity fhould be difregarded, in what they unanimoofly affirm, after careful Examination.

But the Generality of the unlearned confefs the Obligation of Chriftianity moft readily; yet daily tranfgrefs its Laws : and, when they are charged with their Fault, plead Ignorance, as we have feen, amongft other Things, efpecially the lower Part of them, to excufe their Difobedience to the cleareft Revelation of God's Will, that the World ever knew ; and whofe early Diflinction it was, that *the Poor had the Gospel preached to them*<sup>f</sup>. Why then may we not fay to fuch, as our Saviour faid to the Jews ; *Ye Hypocrites, ye can difcern the Face of the Sky and of the Earth* ? You can judge in all the common Affairs of Life. You can attain to a competent Skill, many Times to great Perfection, in your feveral Employments, and Trades : though attended with many Difficulties, and requiring much Application and

<sup>f</sup> Matth. xi. 5.

Dexterity. You can foresee, at a Distance, what will make for your worldly Interest, or against it: you can lay Schemes, full of Cunning and long Reach, for guarding against Dangers, retrieving Losses, securing and improving Advantages. What hinders you then from arriving at the Knowledge of Religion; which consists in Things much easier to be understood: Love and Reverence to God, Justice and Goodness to your Fellow-creatures, reasonable and virtuous Government of yourselves, humble Recourse to the divine Mercy when you have done amiss, and faithful Use of the divine Assistance to amend? If you have Instructors in the Management of Business, and the Wisdom of this World: have you not Instruction also in the Precepts of a Christian Life? One Day in seven of your Time, at least, you are not only allowed, but enjoined, to spend principally in learning and thinking of your Duty. The Word of God is read to you, if you are not able to read it yourselves: it is explained to you, if it be not already plain enough: and the most important Parts are the plainest of all. The several Articles of Christian Faith and Practice are taught you in your earliest Childhood; and imprinted on your Memory at the Time,

when



when Impressions are most lasting. They are afterwards more distinctly proposed to you from this Place, Week after Week ; and enforced on you by Motives no less powerful, than the Love of eternal Happiness and the Dread of eternal Misery. There is no Sin you practise, no good Action you omit, but you are publicly warned, at one Time or another, of your Fault and the Danger of it ; and there is no Doubt or Scruple, that can disquiet you, concerning any Branch of your Behaviour, but you may open your Case often to your more learned and more prudent Neighbours, always to the Ministers of God's Word, and receive Satisfaction about it. What possible Room is there left then for pleading Ignorance of your Lord and Master's Will ? This is a Description of the Means of Knowledge, with which the lowest and meanest among Believers are provided. And even to these may be applied, though not in an equal Degree, yet with great Truth, what our Saviour declared to his immediate Disciples: *Verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have desired to see those Things that ye see, and have not seen them ; and to hear those Things which ye hear, and have not heard them : but*  
*blessed*

*blessed are your Eyes, for they see; and your Ears for they hear*<sup>s</sup>. Ignorant and knowing are comparative Terms: and Men usually compare themselves with those, that are next them only; and draw false conclusions from doing so. A Christian, of smaller Opportunities for Improvement than some of his Fellow-Christians, thinks every Thing ought to be forgiven him for that Reason. And yet, in Reality, not only the admired Sages of heathen Antiquity, but the Patriarchs that were favoured with Communications from Heaven, the Prophets and Penmen of Scripture under the Jewish Dispensation, nay the immediate Fore-runner of our blessed Lord himself, who saw him and conversed with him on Earth, had less Means of Acquaintance with the Doctrines of Religion, than the poorest Disciple of Christ now may have, if he will. *Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of Women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven, in the Gospel Age, is greater than he*<sup>h</sup>.

But it may be imagined perhaps, that the Benefits of religious Instruction are partially represented, and spoken of much too highly,

<sup>s</sup> Matth. xiii. 16, 17.

<sup>h</sup> Matth. xi. 11.

by those who are concerned in dispensing them. Why, be it so then. Let us lay aside for a while the Consideration of what you learn here. Your Maker hath by no Means trusted you intirely to our Care: but hath appointed your Parents, your Friends, every serious Person around you, for your Instructors too: nay, to co-operate with all these, he hath placed a faithful Witness and Monitor of his Truths in every Breast; and therefore the Want of outward Helps can never justify Transgressors. What *Moses* said in God's Name to the Jews, is true in Relation to all Men: *The Commandment, which I command thee this Day, is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off: but the Word is very nigh unto thee, in thy Mouth and in thy Heart, that thou mayest do it*<sup>1</sup>. And what *Isaiab* said of Christianity, holds in Proportion of natural Conscience: *An high Way shall be there: and it shall be called the Way of Holiness: the way-faring Men, though Fools, shall not err therein*<sup>k</sup>. The Duties of Mankind are not so intricate and perplexed, but that a good Heart, without a very sagacious Head, may easily find its Way through them. For the Confirmation of this, let us take a View of the fundamental Parts of practical Religion;

<sup>1</sup> Deut. xxx. 11, 14.

<sup>k</sup> Is. xxxv. 8.

those which Men are most apt to fail in ; and see which of them all any one can fairly say he was ignorant of, or doubtful about, and had not the Means of sufficient Light to direct his Steps.

To begin with the Belief and Worship of Almighty God. Is not every Man capable of seeing, let him be ever so little acquainted with Nature, that the Heavens and the Earth, the Order of the Seasons, the Returns of Day and Night, the whole Frame of Things in general, is full of Use and Beauty ; and must be the Work of amazing Power, Wisdom and Goodness ? Doth not every Man feel, that he is frail and dependent, that his Life and Being is not owing to himself, nor consequently, that of his Parents to them, and therefore they all proceed from a superior Cause ? Doth not every Man perceive, that he is *fearfully and wonderfully made*<sup>1</sup> ; that the several Parts of his Composition are exactly fitted to the several Purposes of Life ; the Eye for seeing, the Ear for hearing, each Member for its respective End ? And his inward Inclinations and Affections no less so, than his outward Limbs ? Must not every Man be sensible, that the Supports and Conveniences, which

<sup>1</sup> Pf. cxxxix. 14.

he enjoys, are not supplied him merely by his own Care; but chiefly by the Providence of another, *who maketh his Sun to rise<sup>m</sup>, his Wind to blow<sup>n</sup>, his Rain to descend*, his Earth to be fruitful? Hath not every Man heard it owned, that the more diligently any one Part of Nature is examined, the fuller Proofs it affords, that an Almighty, allwise and gracious Being, must be the Author of the Whole? And what he hath made, no Doubt but he governs and superintends. This is the plain obvious Account of Things, that one should think must almost offer itself of Course to every common Mind, without any Learning at all: and the deepest Learning gives it the strongest Confirmation. Nor is it so much as pretended, that any Account hath been attempted of the Origin of the World, or any Thing in it, different from what Religion assigns, but it hath been either palpably false and absurd, or impenetrably dark and unintelligible. It being then so clear, that there is a Maker and Preserver of all, infinitely powerful, wise and bounteous, what can be more visible than our Duty; to praise him for his Mercies, pray to him for the Continuance of them, place our Happiness, in his Favour, fear his Displeasure,

<sup>m</sup> Matth. v. 45.<sup>n</sup> Ps. cxlvii. 18.

and do his Will? Surely the most ignorant among us, that think at all, cannot but find all this written in their Hearts: nor can the acutest and most artful dispute against it, without being self-condemned. And what then hath any one to plead for himself, if he lives regardless of Him, *in whom he lives, and moves, and hath his Being*<sup>a</sup>; without Gratitude to his Bounty, from whom all he hath, or can hope for, comes; without Obedience to his Commands, who requires Nothing of us, but for our own Good; without Resignation to his Will, who is rightful Lord of the Universe, and uses boundless Authority only to the Purposes of infinite Goodness? Surely, as the Apostle reasons, *since the invisible Things of God, even his eternal Power and Godhead, are clearly seen from the Creation of the World, being understood by the Things that are made; they are without Excuse, who, when they know God, glorify him not as God, neither are thankful*<sup>b</sup>.

Let us now proceed to the Duties, which we owe to our Fellow-creatures. The Sense of these, because they are of more immediate Importance to the Good of Society, God hath imprinted with greater Strength on our Minds,

<sup>a</sup> Acts xvii. 28.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. i. 20, 21.

than even that of our Obligations to himself. As it must be the Will of him, who is so just and good to us all, that we should be just and good to one another ; and from this Principle, as the Root, every Branch of right Behaviour springs : so he hath planted in our Hearts a natural Love of Equity, a natural Feeling of kind Affection ; a natural Conscience, applauding us when we act according to these Dispositions, condemning us when we violate them : and seldom do we deserve its Reproaches, but either at the Time, or soon after, we undergo them. Consider but a little more particularly, what the mutual Duties of Men are : Honesty and Fairness in their Dealings, Truth in their Words, Friendliness in their Demeanor, Willingness to forgive Offences, respectful Obedience to Superiors, ready Condescension to Inferiors, tender Love to near Relations, Pity and Relief of the Poor, diligent Care to be serviceable to Mankind in our proper Station. Which one of these Obligations (and all the Rest are like them) can any pretend he was ignorant of, or doubtful about ? Who of us all hath ever done an unjust, a hard, an ill-natured, a passionate, an undutiful, an insolent, Action ; or lived an idle, useless life ; and can truly say, he was not sensible that he did amiss ?

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We all know, when others do amiss in these Respects; and therefore we are very capable of knowing, when we do so ourselves. We may drown the Voice of Conscience in turbulent Passions and vehement Pursuits of Profit or Pleasure; we may coolly and deliberately refuse to obey it: but it will speak, and from Time to Time will be heard. And therefore it is not Ignorance or Doubt, but Wickedness of Heart, and *holding the Truth in Unrighteousness*<sup>a</sup>, that makes us negligent of, and injurious to each other, so often as we are.

The third Part of our Duty is the Government of ourselves, according to the Rules of Sobriety, Temperance, and Chastity. Now who doth not know, that the Observance of these Virtues is right and fit: that the Violation of them is prejudicial to the Reason, the Health, the Reputation, the Fortunes; the Families of Men, and introduces Riot and Madness, Confusion and Misery, into the World? Who doth not see, that Superiority to the Cravings of Appetite, and Scorn of irregular Gratifications, is a worthy, an honourable Character: and that Excess, Dissoluteness, and Debauchery, hath something low and shameful in it: and still more so, as, by

<sup>a</sup> Rom. i. 18.



habitual Indulgence, Men come to be less ashamed of it? Can any one say, he did not know, that Gluttony and Drunkenness and promiscuous Lewdness were sins: but thought them as consistent with the Obligations of a rational Nature, the good Order of Society, and the Commands of his Maker, as Moderation and Self-denial? And if no Man is capable of mistaking thus, why, is not *the Judgement of God according to Truth, against them which commit such Things?*

But further yet: Doth not every Man know in his Conscience, that plain as his Duties to God, his Fellow-creatures and himself, are, he hath, more or less, transgressed them all; that he hath a Nature continually prone to Transgression; that therefore he needs both Pardon for what is past, and Assistance for the Time to come; and that he can have neither, but through God's undeserved Mercy? Or, however ignorant Men left to their own Reason may be through Carelessness and Wickedness, as they were indeed amazingly ignorant; or, whatever Doubts they had, after sinning, concerning their Forgiveness and Acceptance, as they could not help having great Doubts: yet at least must not every Professor of the Gospel be sensible, both

• Rom. ii. 2.

what

what he is to do, and what he may promise himself on complying with the Terms which it proposes : and that these are, *Repentance towards God, Faith towards our Lord Jesus Christ*, and humble Use of the appointed Means of Grace : of Attention to the Reading and Preaching of God's Word, earnest Prayer, worthy Participation of the holy Sacrament ? And how can he then plead Ignorance hereafter, if he resolves now to live according to his own Fancy, and to stand or fall by his own Merits ; and haughtily despises, or indolently neglects, applying, as a penitent Sinner ought, to infinite Goodness ?

Upon the whole, since most of the main Branches of our Duty are thus obvious to our Understandings of themselves ; and all of them are constantly taught us, by the holy Scripture, by the Laws of our Country, by the Opinion and Consent of the wisest and best of Mankind, by the Instructions of Persons appointed for that Purpose ; what Account do we imagine we shall possibly be able to give, why Religion, so easily apprehended, is so little practised by us ? If any do not know what is commanded ; it must be, because they avoided knowing it : if any Doubt of the Reality of the Command ; the

Reason is, that they desire to doubt : and how can we flatter ourselves, that any Thing is excusable, which proceeds from a Disposition of Mind so grossly and wilfully wrong ? Suppose a Servant of ours had purposely kept out of the Way of receiving our Orders, or invented Perplexities and Cavils about the Meaning of them, or the Certainty of our having delivered them, because he had no Mind to obey them : would that justify him ? Should we not immediately tell him, that what he easily might and clearly ought to have known and understood, he was inexcusable, if he would not know and understand ? And what must we think of our great Master in Heaven, if we try to impose on Him with Devices and Tricks, that will not pass amongst ourselves ?

But in Reality Men have not this Excuse, if it were one. They do know, how they ought to behave ; they do know that they ought *to live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this World, looking for*<sup>t</sup> the Recompences of another : and they well know in the Main, what Particulars this Obligation comprehends ; how grievously they have fallen short of them, and what need they have to repent and humbly beg Forgiveness

<sup>t</sup> Tit. ii. 12, 13.

and Strength, through him who hath procured us a Title to both. Nor can they pretend, that these are trifling Matters: the Happiness even of this Life depends on them; or, if it did not, the all-seeing God hath enjoined them, as the Conditions and the Means of Happiness in the next; the Judge of the whole Earth will inquire strictly at the great Day into our Performance of them; and there can be no good Account given him, why a plain Duty was omitted or transgressed. We can easily deceive <sup>each other</sup> ~~ourselves~~: we can make specious Pleas one to another for our Failings; which the Occasion that we have for Allowances in our Turn, incline us often to look upon very favourably in our Neighbours. But, in the Sight of God, supposing a Thing incumbent on us, and supposing it easily known to be so: what can be said to the Purpose, why we did not perform it? “We were poor and ignorant.” But we were not, or we needed not to have been, ignorant in this Particular. “We were suspicious and doubtful.” But our Doubts were affected, not real; or partial, not honest and upright. Or if we doubted ever so fairly about some Things; why did not we those, of which we could not doubt? And even for the rest,  
why

why did we not take Care, that our Practice should be on the undoubtedly safer, that is, the virtuous and religious Side? “ But we had strong Inclinations, that prompted us to the Course we took.” No Wonder: here was the Trial of our Virtue; it was our Business to have resisted them, “ But human Virtue is not sufficient.” Therefore we should have applied earnestly for divine Grace, “ But we were surpris’d into wrong Behaviour.” It was our Business to be watchful; and at least a Habit and a Life of Sin cannot happen by Surprise. In short, let us multiply Pretences as long as we please, the very Nature of Duty implies, that it ought to be done.

Still there are some, especially in some Circumstances, who are to a much greater Degree excusable for the Sins they are guilty of, than others. But yet an Excuse is not a Justification: and will least of all prove such to those, who, instead of endeavouring to act right, set themselves to contrive Reasons, why their acting wrong should be dispensed with. It is true, the very best have their Faults: and Faults not indulged shall be forgiven us, if we are truly sorry for them, and earnestly apply to God’s Mercy through Christ for Pardon, and carefully

carefully watch against the Return of them. But when Men first allow themselves to sin, then stand on their own Defence; and particularly, if they plead Ignorance or Doubtfulness of what they have such abundant Means of knowing and being sure of: they must not hope, that this Conduct, if they persevere in it, can escape final Condemnation.

It ought however to be acknowledged after all, that many have comparatively but low Abilities, and small Opportunities for Knowledge: and that to some, whose Understandings are not weak, but perversely turned, greater Opportunities are of small Use; for what enlightens others, only dazzles them. And accordingly our Saviour most equitably considers these Disadvantages; and acquaints us, ten Verses before the Text, that *the Servant, which knew his Lord's Will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his Will, shall be beaten with many Stripes: but he that knew not, and did commit Things worthy of Stripes, shall be beaten with few Stripes*." But these Words, though full of Terror to the great, the learned and the wise, if they neglect their Duty; by no Means carry in them that Encouragement to the Poor, the

<sup>u</sup> Luke xii. 47, 48.

illiterate, and slow of Apprehension, which possibly they may seem to do. For they chiefly relate, not to such Times as ours ; but that, in which they were spoken : when the Jews had great Light, and therefore great Guilt if they sinned ; but the Gentiles were, and had been long, in profound Darkness: *the Times of which Ignorance God is represented, as in Comparison winking at ; but now, in the Gospel Age, he commands, under severer Penalties, all Men every where to repent ;* because he hath given them a clearer Knowledge of his Pleasure, and a fuller *Affurance* of his *judging the World in Righteousness*\*. And yet it must be observed, our Saviour did not apprehend any one to have been so ignorant, even then, of his Master's Will, as to escape being punished for transgressing it ; but declares, that he who knew the least of it ; *he who*, compared with others, *knew it not ;* knew enough however to deserve being *beaten with Stripes ;* though fewer, than they should undergo, who, with stronger Conviction, and distincter Perceptions of their Duty, were equally Transgressors of it. And how severe even the mildest Punishments of a wicked Life may be, God forbid we should any of us try. For whoever sins wilfully in

\* Acts xvii. 30, 31.

Hopes of suffering but little hereafter ; for that very Reason will be made to suffer a great deal.

The Conclusion of the whole Matter is, that we have Reason all to apply to ourselves the Prophet's Words: *He hath shewn thee, O Man, what is good, and what the Lord thy God requireth of thee*<sup>x</sup>. And though it still be true, that some Ages of the World have been dark, and others blinded with false Lights ; that some Men naturally see little, and others are strangely given to see wrong : yet, in general, the Duties of Life are level to the Capacities of all Men : and especially among Christians, but above all, Christians so peculiarly blessed with the Means of Instruction, as we of this Nation are, no one can possibly, without either deliberate Obstinacy, or intolerable Negligence, continue unacquainted with what he is bound to do ; or the Recompence he is to expect, if he do it not. *For this is the Condemnation ; that Light is come into the World, and Men have loved Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil*<sup>y</sup>.

<sup>x</sup> Micah vi. 8.

<sup>y</sup> John iii. 19.





## S E R M O N V.

2 TIM. iii. 4.

—*Lovers of Pleasures, more than Lovers of God.*

THE wise and gracious Ruler of the World, hath created us to obey him, and from that Obedience to receive our proper Share of Happiness. He hath adapted a Variety of Satisfactions to the various Parts of our Frame: and taught us by Nature, but more distinctly by his Word, the due Subordinations of each; and the Circumstances, in which we may or may not lawfully partake of them. Some of these are capable of being exactly specified: and in such we cannot transgress, without either acknowledging our Guilt, or daring to deny the Authority of the Law. Many take the humbler Method of the two, and yet grow little, if at all, better: many the bolder, and grow continually worse. Both are frequently admonished, and may be left at present

to their own Reflections. But other Cafes admit only a general and lefs accurate Description: which leaves Room for thofe, who defire it, to go very improper Lengths, and ftill imagine they are within Bounds. Thus, in eating and drinking; to ufe the good Creatures of God with Delight is certainly allowable: and therefore too many fet their Minds to a ftange Degree on the Practice and the Study of this meaneft of Gratifications; and think they may load and inflame themfelves without Scruple, provided they ftop but at all ftort of fhocking Intemperance. Thus again what we commonly call Amufements are in their Nature innocent. God hath formed us for pleafing Intercourfe, and put Mirth in our Hearts with Intent that we fhould exert it. The fprightly Difpofition of Youth calls for gladfome Activity: the Fatigues of Bufinefs, the Infirmitics of Old Age, the Wearifomenefs of ill Health and low Spirits, often require the beft Relief, that Cheerfulnefs can minifter. And not to allow, that our Maker confiders *whereof we are made*, would be giving an Idea of Religion both unamiable and falfe. But then, juft how far each of us may lawfully

carry our Indulgence, cannot be minutely pointed out. And therefore, instead of being contented to speak and think mildly of others, which would be a right Use of this Uncertainty; we are apt to be negligent of restraining ourselves, which is a very wrong one. For there are numberless Things, in which Limits cannot be fixed precisely, and yet considerable Excesses are destructive. Now in all these, our Ignorance ought to teach us a reasonable, though not scrupulous, Caution: but especially in Matters of gay Entertainment: because the present Age hath confessedly a peculiar Turn that Way. Whether the preceding ones had not other Faults as bad, is out of the Question: our Concern is to watch against our own: for which Purpose the Text affords us a most equitable and comprehensive and trying Direction; that we are not to *love Pleasures more than God*: meaning, than our Duty to Him. For, *this is the Love of God, that we keep his Commandments*<sup>b</sup>. Now he hath enjoined us very important Duties: of improving ourselves in every Thing worthy, and being serviceable to our Fellow-Creatures. What Influence then upon these will our Amusements, as we conduct them, have?

• 1 John v. 3.

The more steadily we apply, without impairing our Healths or Faculties by it, to Affairs of real Use, the properer Part we act in Life. Do then indeed our serious Occupations wear us down so, that we need all the Time, which we take, to recruit ourselves? Or do we only, when we are tired of one Trifle, run to another? Is it Matter of Humiliation to us, that we are obliged to spend so much of every Day insignificantly: or do we take a Pride in spending it thus; lead as many into the same Way as we can, and throw Contempt on those, whom we cannot? Have we impartially examined, what Obligations, public and private, are incumbent on us: whether we are chiefly attentive to these, omitting none; or to what other Things, and what the Benefit of them is: whether it be any other, than keeping ourselves in Humour, like froward Children? We should do well to state the Disposal of our Time: first set down, how much we employ in each of our Concerns of Moment; then how much goes in Diversions of one Kind or another, in preparing for them, in Refreshment after them, in needless Company at home and abroad; and, if the Disproportion be great, think beforehand, how wretched a Void and Blank, at best, our Lives will appear at the  
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Cloſe of them to have been, ſhould the Remainder of them be waſted in the ſame Manner.

We all wiſh to be diſtinguiſhed to our Honour. But in whoſe Eyes will ſuch Perſons, or a Nation compoſed of ſuch, be honoured? and for what Qualifications? Knowledge and Prudence require Induſtry and Experience to attain them: Worth and Probity require thoughtful Self-*inſpection*. And one doth not ſee, how they, who claim only outſide Pre-eminences, can poſſibly eſteem one another; or why they ſhould wiſh to herd ſo much together, unleſs to take Comfort in their mutual Want of Merit. At leaſt vain Opinion will never convert Shew into Subſtance. We muſt ſurely know, that we are capable of more valuable Accompliſhments, and of delighting in them. Probably our Education hath furniſhed us with ſome Experience of improving our Underſtandings and our Tempers. Have we no Room left then for farther Improvements? Or have we loſt the Reliſh of them? And for what better have we exchanged it? Or how unhappily ſoever we were bred, as indeed too many young People are extremely pitiable for having been taught the leaſt of what was moſt worth learning; yet we muſt

be sensible, there are those, who possess more solid Endowments: Are they then of no Value in Life, or have they not in all Ages been allowed to be of the highest? Why therefore should not we strive to resemble them, and take a little Leisure to think, how we may live to more Purpose? It may be, we do not desire Leisure to think. It is unentertaining: it is painful. But what a Figure do we make to others and ourselves, if we cannot bear our own Company, but must fly to any Thing, rather than fail to get rid of it? Thought can be painful only because we are acting amiss: and then thinking so as to amend, is the only Remedy; and no Case is too far gone for it. Perhaps we are unable to carry on solitary Meditation to any good Effect. But we can have Recourse to the Assistance of proper Books. Idle Reading indeed completes the Destruction of the Time, that idle Conversation spares us. But judicious Writings on the Subject of Conduct, religious, moral, and prudent, are at once the Medicine and the Nourishment of the Mind. If still after these we want farther Instruction, every true Friend we have, every good Man we consult, will gladly give it us. And with such Helps,  
why

why should we not assert our Share in the Dignity of human Nature?

But possibly we aspire to appear advantageously both in weightier Matters, and lighter. And by due Application, most People may, as far as they need. But then the chief Regard must ever be paid to the principal Point. For even elegant and liberal and learned Accomplishments have, by excluding still better Things, greatly diminished the Value of many Characters. And when such Attainments, as barely, if at all, rise above indifferent, or perhaps sink below it, divide our Esteem with laudable ones, the Mixture will do great Harm, both to ourselves, and, by its Example, to others. But when they are the main Objects of our Ambition; the Applause of the unthinking, should we procure it, will be bought much too dear; the Soul will lose its Vigour and grow frivolous; Matters of Consequence become distasteful; by Degrees the very Notion, which are so, will be effaced: and a Group of the reigning Follies of the Time being, engross the Heart. But particularly Self-Government will be forgotten in the Midst of Self-Indulgences, that will pretend to be harmless, till they prove undeniably criminal.



minal. In these Circumstances, the Business of our Stations, the Examination of our Affairs, the Care of those who are most intimately connected with us, and, much more, the Inspection of our Hearts, of our State towards God, of our Title to a happy Eternity, will be continually postponed, or superficially hurried over, to comply with every trifling Engagement, every sudden Fancy, or even mere Indolence. And perhaps, rather than take the Pains of knowing and doing what we ought, we shall make it our Refuge to profess a Contempt of it: in which absurd Declaration, a natural or acquired Fluency of lively Talk will bear People out so well to those, with whom Similarity of Manners prompts them to associate, that before it is long, they will seem quite satisfied in neglecting every Thing they should mind.

Yet all the While, what they call a Life of Pleasure is very often only an Affectation of being pleased. They put on Airs of great Gaiety, and in Truth their Pleasures are flat and insipid: they relieve one tasteless Scene by another a little different; are miserable in the Intervals of their Amusements, and far from happy during the Continuance of them. Nay  
indeed,

indeed, under Colour of Relaxations, they are, to those who engage throughly in them, sore Fatigues; from which, whether they will confess it or not, Relaxation is much wanted: and some undergo a speedy, and many a lingering, Martyrdom to them. If Religion enjoined Men to mortify and macerate themselves at this Rate, what dreadful Names would it be called! In all Likelihood, were the Truth known, Numbers would chuse a quieter Way of living, if one Part of them could be sure, that the other would keep them in Countenance. It is great Pity therefore, but they should mutually explain themselves on this Tyranny of Fashion: and not go on together in wild Chaces of imaginary Pleasure, when they had all rather sit still. But farther, several, that would be sorry to quit their Diversions, follow them only to banish Reflection on some bad or imprudent Thing that they have done, or Course that they are in. Now as this can be no better than a palliative Cure, and will usually exasperate the Disease, they ought to seek a more effectual Remedy. And we should all consider, that probably the same Entertainments, will not for ever afford us the same Delight: and yet by long Use it may  
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grow or seem hardly possible to do without them, though they not only misbecome, but even tire us. Nay some, when they have once fixed it in their Minds, that Happiness consists in Gaiety, and find the innocent Sorts of gay Enjoyments are become tasteless, venture, for the Sake of a higher Relish, on such as are pernicious even in this World.

Another Consideration, both of Prudence and Duty, is, that the many Expences of this public Sort of Life are excessive; and to supply them, Creditors are frequently left unpaid, except the least deserving; due Provision for Children is omitted, and ignominious Arts of raising Money practised. Or if the Votaries of Pleasure do observe Justice, let them ask their Consciences, what Proportion of their Income goes in Works of Piety, Mercy, Encouragement of useful Undertakings, and what in luxurious Trifles. It will be said, that these last do Good by setting the poor to labour. But is our Intention to do Good by them, or only to gratify our Vanity and Voluptuousness? Besides, much more Good is done by procuring Health to the sick, right Education to the young, Instruction to the ignorant and vicious, or by durable Works of general Utility and  
national

national Honour. And employing the lower Part of the People in ministering to the Luxury of the higher, can no more enrich or support a Kingdom, than employing the Servants of a private Family in the same Manner, can enrich or support that.

But one fashionable Expence must be particularly mentioned: that which bears the Name, often very falsely, of Play. Be it for ever so little, consuming much Time in it, is the most unimproving and irrational Employment that can be. But false Shame and Emulation frequently raise it to a very incommodious and distressing Height, even amongst those who profess to be moderate. And the Lengths that others go, are the most speedily and absolutely ruinous of all Things. The more calmly Men bear their Losses, the worse; if they are the less likely to leave off for it. But usually they feel most tormenting Agitations: yet rush on to lose more, from a groundless Hope of Gain; and perhaps at Length call in Dishonesty to the Aid of Imprudence. I am unwilling to name the worst Act of Desperation, to which extravagant and vicious Indulgences too frequently lead. But surely it cannot fail to be visible, that deliberately  
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and presumptuously ending an immoral and mischievous Life, by the impious and false Bravery of a voluntary Death, instead of an humble and exemplary Penitence, is the completest Rebellion against God, of which the Heart of Man is capable.

Another considerable Ingredient in the favourite Amusements of the World, are public Spectacles. And provided Regard be had to Time and Cost, they might be allowably and beneficially frequented, if they were preserved from Tendencies dangerous to Virtue. But Failings in that Article totally alter the Nature of them ; and gross Failings reflect not only on our Morals, but our Taste. Indeed it is lamentable that, fond as we are of adopting the Fashions and Qualities of our Neighbours, often much for the worse, we should not import what is praiseworthy in them, but suffer the most dissolute of them to excel us in the Chastity of their dramatical Representations : yet after all, were they ever so innocent, in Proportion as they are trifling and insignificant, they are contemptible and unworthy of Regard.

But the Effects of less general Amusements, even of those at our own Houses, may be extremely hurtful, if they are the Means of  
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admitting Persons of profligate Conduct and Principles into familiar Conversation and Acquaintance with others. For hence they will have the Encouragement of finding, that they need not either amend or conceal their Faults to be well received. The inconsiderate, that is, most People, seeing little or no Difference made between good and bad Characters, will persuade themselves on Occasion, that there can be no great Difference between good and bad Actions. But the young, above all, will be likely to admire those, whom it extremely concerns them to abhor. For, in spite of the most prudent Cautions, which however are not always given them, they are easily imposed on by a shewy Appearance, joined with plausible Talk. And the common Talk of such Assemblies, though it were never openly to assault Virtue, which yet may be especially feared in such of them where People converse in Disguises, and are or may seem unknown to each other, hath notwithstanding many Things to undermine good Principles, and weaken right Sentiments, particularly the continual Supposition on which this whole Way of living is built, that Entertainment is the Business of our Being. They whose only School is the  
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World, will think so of Course : and in such Places cannot be safely contradicted. Possibly, with all this, there may be no immediate strong Symptoms of much Harm suffered in them. But still as a Course of sober Intemperance may damage the Health more, than great Excesses now and then : so may a Life, seemingly but a little too gay, corrupt the Heart more, than a few Acts of confessed Immorality.

And besides the direct Danger to Morals, what Influence will it have on Piety ? About that perhaps we are not solicitous. And yet, the firm Belief of a future Recompence must be the best Security of right Behaviour in all Circumstances. And the King of the whole Earth cannot but require to have the due Respect and Homage he hath appointed paid him by his Subjects, as necessary to preserve that Obedience to his Laws, without which it is impossible they should be happy. Yet the public Worship of God, even on that Day which he hath appropriated to it, is almost intirely neglected by the greatest Part of those who live to Amusements ; and by many of them professedly and contemptuously : though possibly attending it might afford them some Instruction, as well as express proper Duty.

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Much less do they regard any other Seasons, appointed for the peculiar Exercise of Seriousness: but, it may be, affect to crowd Diversions into the most sacred Week of it; either in wanton Defiance of public Authority and common Decency, or in Ostentation of their imagined Superiority to vulgar Ways of thinking. But surely others know as well as they, that outward Observances in themselves are Nothing. But still, by their Effects, both in civil and religious Matters, they are very important Things: and may be useful to the wisest Persons. Though, indeed, when there is a little Weakness mixed with Piety and Virtue, they have no Title to ridicule it, who are guilty of the numberless Absurdities of Dissoluteness or Profaneness. And though the most innocent Superstition should be separated from Religion if it can, yet not with the Hazard of rooting up both together.

But supposing we pay sufficient Regard to these external Proprieties, what Disposition doth our Attachment to Pleasure leave us towards inward Devotion? Do we pray to God in private? Is it with Attention and Reverence? And doth that regulate the rest of the Day, or the rest of the Day wear out the Impression  
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of that? Do we stately think of our Interest in the divine Favour, and our approaching State after Death, as our main Concerns? And do we not only fear the Judge of all, but love the Father of Mercy, such as he hath exhibited himself to Man, by giving his Son to die for us, and his Holy Spirit to move us to all Good? Or hath not our Manner of living deadened our Feeling of these Things, if ever we had any: and are we not proceeding to efface the small Remnants of them? This is not the Behaviour of a rational Creature, of a Penitent for Sin, of a Candidate for eternal Felicity: there can arise from it no *Meetness for the Inheritance of the Saints in Light*<sup>c</sup>; no Susceptibility of spiritual Happiness, no Hope of *escaping the Damnation of Hell*<sup>d</sup>. Not only a few of our detached Hours, but our whole Being is God's, and to be employed as he approves. Our lawful daily Business, nay our needful Relaxations from it, we may humbly present to him, as Part of what he designed us for. But can we offer up a Series of Nothing but idle Dissipations or worse, and beg him to accept of that? Our baptismal Vow promised other

<sup>c</sup> Col. i. 12.

<sup>d</sup> Matth. xxiii. 35.

Things for us: the holy Scripture hath prescribed us a very different Sort of Conduct: hath told us, that we *cannot serve two Masters*<sup>a</sup>; that they, *who live in Pleasure, are dead, while they live*<sup>f</sup>; that he, who delighted himself splendidly every Day, and took this for his Portion, *lift up his Eyes in Torment*<sup>g</sup>. And are we then willing, both to fail of Reward, and suffer Punishment? Perhaps the latter may seem unjust, merely for spending our Days in harmless Diversions. But if otherwise they were harmless, would not a Servant of ours merit punishing, who for his own Gratification should obstinately neglect his allotted Share of Work in the Family? Now we are the Servants of our Maker: and he hath forewarned us, that a *slothful Servant* shall be deemed a *wicked one*<sup>h</sup>.

But the Life of those, who love Pleasure more than God, is fuller of Guilt, in Proportion as it gives others a more public Invitation to live in the same Way. If the rich and great proclaim, that voluptuous Amusements are their Passion, and Religion their Contempt; as it will provoke the better Part of their Inferiors to think ill of them, which is a very undesirable Thing, so it

<sup>a</sup> Matth. vi. 24.

<sup>f</sup> 1 Tim. v. 6.

<sup>g</sup> Luke xvi. 19, 23.

<sup>h</sup> Matth. xxv. 26.

will incline the larger Part, without thinking at all well of them, to imitate their Example. For if they may behave so, the Conclusion will be boldly drawn, that every one else may. And yet the Effects of that Persuasion must be insupportable. For how shall our Domesticks, and nearest Relations, all we have Concerns with, and the Body of the People in general, be kept from every Thing that is wrong and mischievous, in the Midst of such numerous Temptations, if they learn from us to make Self-indulgence, unrestrained by the Apprehensions of a future Account, their governing Principle? Our Laws cannot be executed with Rigour: and Legislators and Magistrates will not be thought in earnest, or, if they are, will be thought injurious, when they prohibit what the Practice of too many of them shews, they look upon as the only happy Life.

People of Fashion, especially of that Sex, which ascribes to itself the most Knowledge, have nearly thrown off all Observation of the Lord's Day: perhaps keep such Hours, that neither they, nor their Families, can go to Church, at least in one Part of it: will vary those Hours readily for any other Purpose, but by no Means for this. And when they have  
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passed the Morning and Afternoon in Neglect of Piety, Numbers of them pass the Evening in what they know will be commonly interpreted, and the more for that Neglect, an open Contradiction to Piety. Or if, to avoid Scandal, they sometimes vouchsafe their Attendance on divine Service in the Country, they seldom or never do it in Town : where Patterns of it are peculiarly needful ; and from whence Accounts of their Behaviour will soon be spread to the remotest Places where they have Influence. Now by these Means the Sunday, instead of being made, to those beneath them, the usefullest Part of their Time, by religious Worship and Instruction, Reading and Thought ; as well as the Pleasantest, by Rest from Labour and friendly Intercourse ; becomes the most pernicious. A large Proportion of the Tradesmen in these two Cities usually spend the Whole of it abroad in Diversions, often vicious, always costly : and by affecting them then, get a ruinous Taste for them throughout the Week. The lower Sort still are ambitious to follow them as close as they can, every Day indeed, but on that especially : consume the Beginning of it, in stupid Sloth, the Remainder in Lewdness or Drunkenness, which impair their Faculties and destroy their Health ;

besides intercepting the Profits of their Labour from those, whom it should maintain. And if they once come to think Gaming also allowable on that only Time, in which they have Leisure for it; the Losers will be yet more thoroughly undone and desperate, and the Winners not the richer, but only the more debauched.

Every Species of Wickedness cannot fail to make a great Progress amidst these licentious Principles and Practices: which are industriously propagated, both by the Discourse of bad Men, contrary to all common Prudence, and in Books also, published not only against revealed Religion, (which they who disbelieve will few of them believe any, and none to any great Purpose) but against a future Recompence of human Actions; and suited, in the Manner of writing, to every Reader, and, in the Price, to every Purchaser. Such as have learnt these Lessons, will yield, and no Wonder, to the present Solicitation of each Appetite and each Fancy, be the Consequences what they may. When they are distressed, they will venture on whatever Crime they think may enable them to go on a little longer: they will endeavour to conceal a first Crime by a second; and if at last they cannot

cannot evade Punishment, they will despise it. For what is even Death, which every one may make as easy as he pleases, if they neither hope nor fear any Thing after it.

We of the Clergy are principally concerned to oppose this Torrent of Impiety: and I trust we do it with faithful Zeal. But the immediate Answer to us is, that we are pleading our own Cause: though indeed it is that of the Public. And therefore the hearty Concurrence of the Laity, jointly countenancing, by their Examples, their Favours, their Commendations, their Reproofs, by Reverence to Religion, Moderation in Pleasures, Frugality in Expence, Diligence in the Business of every one's proper Station, is highly necessary: and will complete the Blessing of the fullest Liberty, and most fatherly Administration of Government, that ever Nation enjoyed; which otherwise we are in imminent Danger of abusing, to our own deserved Ruin.

Yet too great strictness may do Harm, or disqualify for doing Good: and according to Circumstances, partaking of Amusements, that otherwise are not eligible, may be very prudent: besides that some may be under such Authority and Direction, as may oblige them

in Duty to what they cannot intirely approve. And then they should endeavour to do it both obligingly and gracefully : but always remember, that they are on slippery Ground : never go farther, than is really innocent ; never farther, than they need : much less, blame or despise those, who are unwilling or unqualified to bear a Part with them : but carefully preserve a just Preference for the higher Order of Obligations ; be humble in the Midst of Pomp, attentive to serious Reflections in the Midst of Gaiety ; do all they can, without exposing themselves, to guard or bring back others : and seize every Opportunity of promoting what is right, where too generally what is wrong abounds.

But they who are not called to enter far into the livelier Scenes of this World, will do very commendably, to shew by Facts, in a freer and opener Manner, their settled Persuasion, that Happiness consists in quite other Matters ; to shew, that they can enjoy themselves perfectly well, without having any Relish for these ; nay, can abstain from them without Difficulty, though they have a Relish for them. And the more they do so, keeping up their good Humour, the more exemplary they are. But  
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the Clergy should be patterns of this Abstinence beyond all others. For if instead of being grave and studious and laborious in our Profession we dissipate ourselves in Vanities, or sink into luxurious Delicacy or Indolence; the Awe of our Character, and the Weight of our Preaching will be lost: the thoughtless will imagine they may safely step a little farther than we; and thus will fall into palpable Sin: while the indifferent to Religion and Virtue will make it their Boast, that we aim to be as like them as for Shame we can; and will *blaspheme*, on our Account, *the worthy Name, by which we are called*<sup>1</sup>.

Possibly so many Cautions against Fondness for Pleasure may seem to leave those who regard them, in a very joyless and uneasy Condition. But indeed they are only plain and very practicable Rules for that Discipline of our Temper and Conduct, which is necessary for our true Happiness even here, and for our eternal Felicity hereafter. Christian Piety allows us, under such Regulations as are evidently reasonable, every Enjoyment of Sense, every Delight of elegant Taste, every Exertion of social Cheerfulness; and forbids Nothing, but Mischiefs, Madness and Misery. Then besides, it height-

<sup>1</sup> James ii. 7.



ens to the utmost all the nobler Satisfactions of the Mind: that of sincere Good-will to all Men; that of tender Complacency in those, to whom we are united more nearly: whence proceed honourable Esteem, and affectionate Returns. Or, though we miss the Regard we deserve from Men, we shall have a reviving Consciousness, that we have acted worthily, that we have laboured to promote Goodness and Happiness on Earth, that the Sins and Sufferings of our Fellow-creatures are not owing to us. This applauding Testimony of our Hearts will indeed be mixed with the Grief of many Failings: but also, with the Assurance, that our heavenly Father forgives them, for the Sake of our gracious Redeemer; with the Experience, that he is enabling us to overcome them, by the Grace of our inward Sanctifier, and preparing us daily for the Blessedness, to which he invites us. For such Mercies we cannot but love him: and whoever doth so, is in Proportion beloved by him. The Sense of this must give us great Composure about every Thing worldly, Disdain of every Thing vicious, and Comfort in going through the very lowest and hardest Acts of Duty. We shall pass the Days of our Pilgrimage in as much Delight as  
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the Nature of it affords : and when we come to our final Abode, every Capacity of spiritual Enjoyment, to which we have improved ourselves here, shall be inconceivably augmented, and completely filled : we shall *be abundantly satisfied with the Fatness of God's House, and drink of the River of his Pleasures*<sup>k</sup>. For in his Presence is the Fullness of Joy, and at his right Hand there are Pleasures for evermore<sup>l</sup>.

<sup>k</sup> Psal. xxxvi. 8.

<sup>l</sup> Psal. xvi. 11.



## S E R M O N VI.

HEB. xii. 2.

*Looking unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our Faith: who, for the Joy that was set before him, endured the Cross, despising the Shame, and is set down at the right Hand of the Throne of God.*

**D**IRECTING our Eye is necessary for guiding our Steps; and therefore the Apostle here directs the Eye of our Mind to Jesus Christ: whom if we so contemplate, as to learn what he was, and expects us to be, Nothing will be wanting to carry us happily through the Journey of Life. And it may be useful to begin with considering his familiar Manifestation of himself on Earth, whence we shall naturally be led to consider his higher and more awful Glories.

Now in this lowest View, we shall find him to have been the most amiable and the most venerable

venerable Person, beyond all Comparifon, that the World ever knew. Meditate only with ferious Attention on the evidently artlefs Account given of him in the Gofpels, and you will fee, with an Admiration continually increafing, how perfect his Character was in every Point : how warm his Sentiments, yet how juft his Notions, of Piety to his heavenly Father ; how ftrong and affectionate his expreffions of it ; yet how rational, and how peculiarly fuitable to his very peculiar Situation : how compofed his Relignation, though with the acuteft Feeling of all that he underwent ; and how firm his Truft in God even at the Hour of Death, under the moft painful Senfe of the Light of his Countenance being withdrawn from him : how regular his Practice of the Whole of Religion, yet how accurate his Preference of one Part of it to another : how active and bold and perfevering his Zeal ; yet how completely free from all the Weaknefs, and all the Bitternefs, with which Zeal is too often accompanied ; how intimately tempered with Patience towards the flow of Apprehenfion ; Esteem for the well meaning though erroneous ; Pity for the bad, though perverfe and incorrigible : what perpetual

perpetual Demonstrations he gave, of Benevolence and Purity in his teaching, of Goodness and Condescension, Meekness and Tenderness, in his Behaviour, to all Persons, however provoking, on all Occasions, however trying: yet Goodness judiciously exercised, Condescension with Dignity, Meekness with due Severity against Sin, Tenderness without Partiality, or improper Compliances, to the nearest of his Kindred, or the dearest of his Disciples: how compassionate a Love he shewed to his Country; yet how unlimited a Good-will to all the World: how remote he was from Self-indulgence, yet how far from encouraging useless Rigour and Austerity: how diligently he turned the Thoughts of the Multitude, from empty Admiration of his Discourses or his Works, to the conscientious Performance of their own Duties; declined the most favourable Opportunities of rising to worldly Power, and inculcated on his Followers the strongest Warnings of what he and they were to suffer: with what Plainness he reproved both the People and their Rulers, yet with what Care he secured the Respect owing from the former to the latter: with what Simplicity and upright Prudence

he answered the Objections and captious Questions levelled against him, however suddenly attacked by them; and, though in so public a Life tried every Way continually, never once was overcome, never once disconcerted: how surprizingly he avoided all the Artifices and all the Violence of his Enemies, as long as he chose it; and how much superior, not only to them, but, if possible, even to himself, he appeared, after he had put himself into their Hands, during the Whole of their barbarous and despiteful Treatment. Nor can it fail to be observed, as a most important Circumstance, that all his wonderful Perfections were evidently natural to him, and sat absolutely easy upon him, without the least Variation, or Inequality, or Effort exerted to raise himself up to, or support, the highest Excellence, that he ever displayed. In short, the Character of Jesus Christ, like the Frame of God's Creation, the more deeply it is studied, the more respectfully it will be admired. Some small Particulars in each, yet much fewer than superficial Observers imagine, it may be easier to cavil at, than to account for distinctly: but look at the Whole of either, and to every Eye that is capable of taking in a Whole,

it

it will approve itself uniformly great and good.

Now that he, of whom these Things are recorded, was a real Man, and not a Phantom of the Imagination, Infidelity itself hath never denied. And that he was truly the excellent Man, that the Gospels describe him to have been, we have the Testimony of Numbers that knew him, of more who conversed with those that knew him; who all asserted it in the strongest Terms, and suffered every Thing terrible for so doing. Their Enemies were never able to disprove them: if they had, Christianity must have sunk: and indeed some of the most considerable of their Enemies, in all Ages, have owned them to be so far in the right. But if still it be pretended, that his Portrait was drawn too favourably; who could draw it so? The *Greeks* and *Romans* never drew any, either from Life or Fancy, without some capital Fault. How came the *Jews*, how came the illiterate Evangelists, by such extraordinary Skill? And further, how came they to ascribe such mild, such passive Virtues, to their Messiah, whom the whole Nation expected to be, on the contrary, an enterprizing and prosperous Warrior? Had one of them deviated so unaccountably



accountably from the general Opinion; is it credible that they all should? Had every one of them attempted to make a beautiful Picture of that Sort, without Regard to the Original; would all their Pictures have been like, yet each distinguished by such Peculiarities, as proved none of them to be copied from the other? Or supposing even that, could they have persuaded an unwilling World, that these resembled this Original, when plainly they did not?

Now if their Narratives be faithful Descriptions of a real Person, well may we ask, as the *Jews* did with another Spirit, *Whence hath this Man these Things; and what Wisdom is this, which is given unto him? Is not this the Carpenter's Son?* What Education had he to form him, what Patterns to form himself upon, to become the Man he was? By what Train of thinking could he be led to conceive, by what Prospects could he be moved to undertake, by what Power was he enabled to accomplish, the unparalleled Things he did? To imagine that such a one existed by Accident, is monstrously unreasonable. But that he should also have fallen by Accident, just into that

<sup>a</sup> Mark vi. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. xiii. 55.

single Country, in which there was a System of Religion, that he could build on, with a Series of Predictions applicable to himself; and just at that Period too, which these Predictions had so pointed out, as to raise an universal Expectation of him: that under all the Disadvantages of a low Condition he should have Spirit enough to make and maintain the highest of Claims, Sagacity enough to interpret the ancient Oracles in a much sublimer and juster Sense, than any of the most learned Instructors of the People, and Self-denial enough to prefer, in Consequence of these Interpretations, Persecution and Crucifixion before the Safety of a private Station, or the Splendor of offered Dominion: that every one of these Things, (and others equally strange might be added) should meet in the same Man, without the especial Appointment of Heaven, exceeds all Power of Chance. Consider him only as a mere Man, he appears to have been unspeakably the greatest and best of Men. Consider only those Consequences of his coming into the World, which even Unbelievers must acknowledge, he appears to be the most important Person, that ever did come into it. The general Reasonableness of his Doctrine,

the Coolness of his Temper, the Composedness and Familiarity of his whole Conversation, prove he was no Enthusiast: the unvaried Goodness of his Life, the Willingness with which he suffered Death, the Impossibility, which his Understanding could not but see, of attaining any worldly Advantage by the Course, which he took; nay indeed, the Difficulties which he left in some Articles of his Scheme, and needed not, if he had contrived it to serve a Turn, prove full as evidently, that he was no Impostor. What must he have been then? And what else can we gather from his whole Behaviour, than what the Spectators did from the finishing Scene of it upon the Cross: *Truly this was the Son of God?*

But if indeed a Title so transcendent belongs to *Jesus*, we are surely bound to learn, with the utmost Docility, from the Scriptures written by his Direction, what it comprehends, and what is connected with it. There we read, that *in the Beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*<sup>a</sup>: that by him the Father created all Things, and by him hath conducted, ever since, the Concerns of this World; whence he is called, in the Text, *the Author and Finisher of our Faith*.

<sup>c</sup> Matth. xxvii. 54.

<sup>a</sup> John i. 1.

He laid the Ground-work of it immediately on the Fall of our first Parents, the Consequences of which we all feel, in the gracious Intimation given them, that *the Seed of the Woman*<sup>e</sup> should destroy the Serpent's Power: and afterwards made valuable Additions to it of *precious Promises*<sup>f</sup> from Time to Time. When Idolatry and Vice had overspread the rest of the World; he preserved it with peculiar Care in one Nation, *as a Light shining in a dark Place*<sup>g</sup>, for the Benefit of all, who would turn their Eyes towards it; and, by a Chain of wonderful Providences, brought on the proper Season for diffusing it throughout the Earth. Then he divested himself of *the Glory, which he had with the Father before the World was*<sup>h</sup>; *the Word became Flesh, and dwelt amongst us*<sup>i</sup>: taught Men in Person the great Truths of Religion, confirmed them by beneficent Miracles performed, and illustrious Prophecies fulfilled; exemplified them, as I have said, in his Practice; and provided the Means of their descending uncorrupted to all future Ages, and being efficaciously applied to the Conviction of the Wicked, and the Comfort of the good. So fully is he, and he

<sup>e</sup> Gen. iii. 15.

<sup>h</sup> John xvii. 5.

<sup>f</sup> 2 Pet. i. 4.

<sup>i</sup> John i. 14.

<sup>g</sup> Verse 19.

could not be more fully, what the Apostle calls him: who next reminds us, that in carrying on this inconceivably kind Work, he willingly underwent all Manner of ill Usage, and at length *endured* the Pain, and *despised the Shame, of the Cross*, inflicted on him by Wretches, for whom his Precepts were too holy, and his Life too harmless; that so he might demonstrate his Sincerity, and set a Pattern of doing the hardest Things, which he taught. Nay, he submitted farther, to become the Representative of Transgressors; to be forsaken of God, and have his Soul made sorrowful unto Death, in that mysterious Dispensation of laying on him the Iniquities of us all: in order to give the most tremendous Proof of the Heinousness of Sin; that such a one as he should suffer so much, to induce the just and wise, though equally merciful, Ruler of all to forgive it, and engage and enable the guilty to forsake it.

These Things he did, the Text goes on to say, *for the Joy that was set before him*: the Joy of illustrating at once the Holiness and Goodness of God, who appointed and accepted this Method of our Salvation: the Joy of reforming and making happy, in themselves

and one another, in Time and to Eternity, all those Multitudes, who in every Generation should embrace his Offers; and lastly, the Joy of being deservedly honoured, as the blessed Instrument of these inestimable Benefits.

Accordingly he hath the Honour, as the Apostle proceeds to observe, of sitting down at the right Hand of the Throne of God: being placed, in Respect of that Nature which he condescended to assume, and the Sufferings of which are thus properly rewarded, in a State of supreme Felicity, at the Head of the whole Creation, *Angels and Authorities being made subject unto him<sup>k</sup>*. And in this exalted Station he shall remain, superintending the Affairs of the Universe, till he returns to our Earth at the Day of Judgment. *Then every Eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him<sup>l</sup>*, they which blaspheme him, and they which, professing, yet *obey not his Gospel: who shall be punished with everlasting Destruction from the Presence of the Lord, when he shall come to be glorified in his Saints, and to be admired in all them that believe<sup>m</sup>*.

This then is he, to whom we are directed to look: to *look off*, for so the Word signifies,

<sup>k</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 22.

<sup>l</sup> Rev. i. 7.

<sup>m</sup> 2 Theff. i. 8, 9, 10.

from other Objects, unsafe or unworthy, and contemplate him : not only as the most excellent of Men, but a Being raised *far above every Name that is named, either in this World, or that which is to come*<sup>a</sup>: nor only as thus eminent in himself, but as our greatest Benefactor and truest Friend ; our wise Lawgiver and spotless Example ; the Sacrifice by whose Blood we are washed from our Sins ; the Head of the Body, of which we are Members ; the Judge, on whose Sentence our everlasting State depends : our Prophet, our Priest and our King ; our Saviour, *our Lord and our God*<sup>b</sup>.

Surely of such a one it seems impossible to think lowly : and almost unavoidable to think often and much. Yet were we to examine ourselves, how frequently or how seldom we recollect his Perfections, and our most interesting Relations to him ; whether we are strongly or slightly affected by them ; whether we principally attend to his Rules of Life, or those which are suggested by inconsiderate Custom, vicious Inclination, or vain Self-Opinion, falsely called Reason ; whether, even if we mean to do well, we pray with Humility for his Grace, or trust our own imagined

<sup>a</sup> Eph. i. 21.

<sup>b</sup> John xx. 28.

Strength ;

Strength; and lastly, whether after *doing all* we can, we rely on his Merits, as *unprofitable Servants*<sup>p</sup>, or hope for Salvation by our own sinful good Deeds; what Answer must the Consciences of many of us make? Such undoubtedly as will at least evidence the Need of fixing our Thoughts upon him much more steadily, than we have done; of stirring up in our Hearts the warmest Sentiments of Reverence, Gratitude and Love towards him; (for who can be equally intitled to them, or what Employment so delightful or beneficial?) and of exerting them in every Act, which he hath appointed, or his Followers found serviceable. External Acts of themselves indeed are Nothing: but when they proceed from a good Principle within, and are chosen and used with Discretion, they keep up the Vigour of the Mind, and strengthen good Habits inexpressibly. The Importance of them in civil Affairs is every where acknowledged: and how can we fancy it to be less in religious? Therefore if indeed we honour our Redeemer, we must shew that we honour his Sacraments, his Ordinances, the weekly, the yearly Days consecrated to him, the Places of his Worship: permit me to add, his Ministers, only

<sup>p</sup> Luke xvii. 10.



being careful to distinguish, for the Sake of our Master and of Mankind, the devout, the laborious, the disinterested, from the Lovers of Pleasure or Gain, of Power or Applause, from the formal, the thoughtless, the lukewarm.

Nor will he, whose Respect to *the Author and Finisher of our Faith* is real, either seek or wish to shelter himself from infidel Scorn by leaving the Motives of his Conduct in religious Matters doubtful : but openly, though decently, make it known to all Men, of which Side he in Truth is ; and do at least as much for the Cause of God, as he could with Propriety for any other, that he hath at Heart : recollecting that thus the pious will be animated, the Opposers staggered, the indolent awakened ; and likewise, that them only *who confess him before Men, will Jesus confess before his Father which is in Heaven*<sup>9</sup>.

But Zeal for his Mission and Doctrines will be of no Avail, without Imitation of his Example and Obedience to his Laws. As on the one Hand, the Virtue which Men profess without Religion, the Religion which they profess without Christianity, the Christianity which they profess without Affection to

<sup>9</sup> Matth. x. 32.

Christ, is essentially imperfect, and mostly nominal: they model it into what they please, and it wastes away to Nothing: so on the other, not only hypocritical, but partial, Attachment to him, Fondness for him as the Obtainer of Pardon and future Happiness, and Slight of him as the Director of Life; hoping to be saved by Faith without Works, or waiting for his Grace to amend us without taking Pains to amend ourselves; these Things *put his Gospel and him to open Shame*. We must *look unto Jesus*, as our Exemplar and Legislator: else we shall look to him in vain as our Saviour.

Some of his Actions indeed were appropriated to his Office; and some of his Precepts, to that of his Apostles. But whatever was temporary or singular in either, is easily discerned, and the rest binds us all. Therefore we must *learn of him to be meek and lowly: for so shall we find Rest for our Souls*. We must condescend, when Occasion requires, to the meanest Instances of mutual Service: for *our Master and Lord washed his Disciples Feet, that they should do as he had done to them*. We must take the most injurious Provocations patiently:

† Heb. vi. 6.    † Matth. xi. 29.    † John xiii. 5, 13, 15.  
for

for he, *when he was reviled, reviled not again, when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously*<sup>v</sup>. We must *forgive one another, as God for Christ's Sake is ready to forgive us*<sup>v</sup>. We must *speak the Truth every Man with his Neighbour*<sup>z</sup>, for there was no Guile found in his Mouth<sup>y</sup>. We must be *harmless and undefiled, separate from Sinners*<sup>z</sup>, in our Temper and Practice, even when obliged to be most in their Company; for so was he, conversing with them, as a Physician with the sick. In a Word, *the same Mind must be in us, which was in Christ Jesus*<sup>a</sup> our Lord.

And we must not only avoid gross Transgressions and Omissions; but *purify ourselves as he is pure*<sup>b</sup>, and *perfect Holiness in the Fear of God*<sup>c</sup>. Ambition, Worldliness, Delicacy, Voluptuousness, Dissipation, Eagerness for Amusements and Trifles, are utterly beneath us, and unsuitable to our Profession. A Christian is a Character of Dignity: and though he submits with a graceful Willingness to whatever his Condition here demands: yet he *sets his Affection only on the Things above*<sup>d</sup>; and

<sup>v</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 23.

<sup>y</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 22.

<sup>b</sup> 1 John iii. 3.

<sup>v</sup> Eph. iv. 32.

<sup>z</sup> Heb. vii. 26.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. vii. 1.

<sup>x</sup> Eph. iv. 25.

<sup>a</sup> Phil. ii. 5.

<sup>d</sup> Col. iii. 2.

from the View of his Redeemer placed there at the right Hand of God, draws his Directions for his Conduct below : reasoning with *St. Paul, The Love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and he died for all, that they which live, should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again<sup>e</sup>.*

Such as are duly moved by this Consideration will faithfully perform, not only the general Duties of Life, but the particular ones of their Rank and Circumstances. Persons in Authority will reflect, that he who is *Lord of Lords<sup>f</sup>, and the Prince of the Kings of the Earth<sup>g</sup>*, hath deputed them for a Work, similar to his own final one, *the Punishment of Evil-doers, and the Praise of them that do well<sup>h</sup>*; and consequently will inform themselves concerning both. *He needed not*, when upon Earth, *that any should testify of Man; for he knew what was in Man<sup>i</sup>*. But sagacious Inquiry and strict Observation are necessary for their executing that noble Plan, which *David* hath laid down for them in the 101<sup>st</sup> Psalm. Happy the Nation, where it is pursued with

<sup>e</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14, 15.

<sup>f</sup> Rev. xvii. 14.

<sup>g</sup> Rev. i. 5.

<sup>h</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 14.

<sup>i</sup> John ii. 25.

Gentleness and Candor, yet with Spirit and Efficacy, that the ill-inclined *may bear and fear, and do no more presumptuously*<sup>k</sup>.

Again: the Ministers of the Gospel, if they look unto and *love the Lord Jesus in Sincerity*<sup>l</sup>, will imitate his Assiduity in giving Instruction, his Compassion to Penitents, his plain Denunciations against obstinate Sinners, his Contempt of unjust Reproach, yet his Caution to guard against needless Offence: will accommodate their Discourses, as he did, to the Wants, the Dispositions, the Capacities of their Hearers; *condescending* in this and all Things *to Men of low Estate*<sup>m</sup>: will remember, that *his Kingdom is not of this World*<sup>n</sup>, and use whatever Advantages they enjoy in it, to the Purposes of the next: be in every good Sense, as he was, but in no bad one, *the Friends of Publicans and Sinners*<sup>o</sup>; neither act as being *Lords over God's Heritage, but ensamples to the Flock, that when the chief Shepherd shall appear, they may receive a Crown of Glory*<sup>p</sup>. Wherefore holy Brethren, Partakers of the heavenly Calling, consider the *Apostle and High-Priest of our Profession*<sup>q</sup>.

<sup>k</sup> Deut. xvii. 13.

<sup>l</sup> Eph. vi. 24.

<sup>m</sup> Rom. xii. 16.

<sup>n</sup> John xviii. 36.

<sup>o</sup> Matth. xi. 19.

<sup>p</sup> 1 Pet. v. 3, 4.

<sup>q</sup> Heb. iii. 1.

Further yet : those who have large Incomes, if they fix their Thoughts on him, *who for our Sakes became poor, that we, through his Poverty, might become rich<sup>a</sup> in good Works<sup>b</sup>* and heavenly Treasures, will be powerfully excited not to place their Happiness, either in the Acquisition or Possession of Wealth, or the Enjoyment of any of those Pleasures which Wealth can help to procure : but in doing Good, as the blessed *Jesus* did, and benefiting their *Brethren for whom he died<sup>c</sup>*. To do this more effectually, they will set an Example of prudent Self-restraint and Frugality, which may preserve Multitudes of others, if not themselves from Follies and Distresses : they will employ what is thus saved in Acts of judicious Charity ; and have constantly in their Minds what many, who are extremely liberal, strangely forget, that all Expences, and seeming Bounties, which tend to corrupt Morals, are mischievous ; and using Methods to make Men pious and virtuous, providing for their Souls at the same Time with their Bodies, which our Saviour did continually, conduces beyond all Things even to their present Welfare.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. viii. 9.<sup>b</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 18.<sup>c</sup> Rom. xiv. 10, 15.

Lastly,

Lastly, they who are afflicted, (and who is not often so in one Respect or another?) if they dwell, as the Text was meant to advise them particularly, on the Contemplation of our compassionate High-Priest, *the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with Grief*<sup>u</sup>, will learn from him to endure *all the Contradiction of Sinners*, and all *the heavy Yoke that is laid on the Sons of Adam*<sup>v</sup>, Disesteem, Ingratitude, Perverseness, Insolence, Disappointment, Poverty, Pain and Death, without being *wearry or faint in their Minds*<sup>w</sup>. He, though faultless, endured much more than we Sinners shall be called to: under every Trial *his Grace will be sufficient for us*<sup>x</sup>: *if we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him*<sup>z</sup>; the more we undergo, the greater will be our Reward: and what have we then to resent or fear or be dejected about, or whom to envy? Miserable Comforts are all the worldly Means, by which Men labour in vain to deceive themselves, and mitigate their Wretchedness, compared with the *everlasting Consolation and good Hope, which our Lord Jesus Christ hath given us*<sup>a</sup>, whose Words are, *To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with*

<sup>u</sup> 11. liii. 3.

<sup>v</sup> 2 Cor. xii. 9.

<sup>w</sup> Eccclus. xl. 1.

<sup>z</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 12.

<sup>x</sup> Heb. xii. 3.

<sup>a</sup> 2 Theff. ii. 16.

*me in my Throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his Throne<sup>b</sup>.*

Let every one therefore of every Degree *fight the good Fight of Faith, and lay hold on eternal Life, whereunto he is called<sup>c</sup>: for these are not cunningly devised Fables<sup>d</sup>, but the true Sayings of God<sup>e</sup>.* They who have hitherto lived in Sin, (and so far we all have, that by his Obedience to the Law no Man is justified in the Sight of God<sup>f</sup>) let them *flee to the merciful Jesus from the Wrath to come<sup>g</sup>, acquaint themselves with him, and be at Peace<sup>h</sup>.* They that once had a Sense of Religion, but *have left their first Love<sup>i</sup>, drawn away by vicious Indulgences, or temporal Interests, or the Instruction that causeth to err from the Words of Knowledge<sup>k</sup>,* let them remember from whence they are *fallen, and repent, and do their first Works<sup>l</sup>.* They, who have hitherto persevered in Piety, let them form in themselves, as they will always have Room and Need, a still completer Image of Christ. And let us all incessantly study to acquire that constant, that affectionate and influencing Attention to him,

<sup>b</sup> Rev. iii. 21.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Tim. vi. 12.

<sup>d</sup> 2 Pet. i. 16.

<sup>e</sup> Rev. 19. 9.

<sup>f</sup> Gal. ii. 16. iii. 11.

<sup>g</sup> Matth. iii. 7.

<sup>h</sup> Job xxii. 21.

<sup>i</sup> Rev. ii. 4.

<sup>k</sup> Prov. xix. 27.

<sup>l</sup> Rev. ii. 5.



for which St. *Peter* celebrates the early Christians, when he saith, *Whom having not seen, ye love : in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory, receiving the End of your Faith, even the Salvation of your Souls<sup>m</sup>.*

<sup>m</sup> 1 Pet. i. 8, 9.

# S E R M O N VII.

I COR. i. 22, 23, 24.

*For the Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom;*

*But we preach Christ crucified: unto the Jews a Stumbling-block, and unto the Greeks Foolishness;*

*But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ, the Power of God, and the Wisdom of God.*

**T**O expect eternal Life through a Saviour who died for us, is the fundamental Doctrine of the Christian Profession: the Article, that distinguishes our Faith from all others, and with which our Religion stands or falls. The New Testament therefore dwells much on the Importance of this Belief: and especially the Epistles of St. Paul inculcate it every where. He *determined*, though a Man of extensive Knowledge, *not to know any Thing among* those whom he instructed, to insist on no Subject, comparatively speaking, *save Christ*

*Jesus, and him crucified*<sup>a</sup>. Still both he, and the rest of the Apostles, must plainly foresee, and they quickly experienced, as the Preachers of the Gospel have done ever since, that the Prejudices of many, and the Pride of all Men, would find much Difficulty in submitting to owe their Salvation to another; especially to one, who had lived so poor a Life, and suffered so disgraceful a Death; which would all be avoided by teaching them to ascribe the whole Merit of it to themselves. But *they had not so learned Christ*<sup>b</sup>, as to *handle the Word of God deceitfully*<sup>c</sup>. They knew, that what seemed to human Vanity weak and ill-judged, was the true and only Way to heavenly Happiness. And therefore, though *the Jews required a Sign*, &c.

In discoursing on these Words, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. What it is to *preach Christ crucified*.

II. Whence it came to pass, that this was  
to the Jews a *Stumbling-block*, and to  
the Greeks *Foolishness*.

III. That, notwithstanding, it places in a  
strong Light both *the Power and the  
Wisdom of God*.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Eph. iv. 20.

<sup>c</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 2.

I. What it is to *preach Christ crucified*.  
 Now this, in one Word, is to lay before Men the Nature and Terms of that *eternal Salvation*, of which, by his suffering on the Cross, he is *become the Author unto all that obey him*<sup>a</sup>. More particularly it is to instruct them in the following great Truths : that there ever hath, doth, and will exist, one infinite Being, perfectly wise, just and good, the almighty Maker and Ruler of the Universe ; who created Man for the Practice of Piety and Virtue, and for the Enjoyment of everlasting Life : that our first Parents, by wilfully transgressing a most equitable Command of his, forfeited their Title to Immortality, disordered the Frame of their Bodies and Minds, and derived to us the same corrupt and mortal Nature, to which they had reduced themselves : that being in this Condition through their Fault, all Men sunk into a still worse, by committing many Sins, which, however prone to them, they might have had the Means of avoiding ; and thus have deserved Punishment here and hereafter : that, Wickedness prevailing early, and spreading wide in the World, first the Practice, then the Knowledge, both of true Reli-

<sup>a</sup> Heb. v. 9.

gion and moral Virtue, were in a great Measure lost out of it : but that the unspeakable Mercy and Wisdom of the Supreme Being provided a Remedy for these Evils, intimated in general Terms to the earliest Offenders, promised more distinctly in the succeeding Ages, and actually given *when the proper Fulness of Time came*<sup>e</sup> ; which Remedy was this. A Person, made known under the Character of the only-begotten Son of God, and one with the Father in a Manner to us incomprehensible, after teaching Mankind from the Beginning by various other Methods, took upon him our Nature, was born of a Virgin, and dwelt on Earth, to teach us personally by his Word and Example: condescended, for this compassionate Purpose, to all the Inconveniences of the present State of Things, to numberless Indignities and Sufferings, and lastly to have his Life taken away by the Hands of wicked Men ; *humbling himself unto Death, even the Death of the Cross*<sup>f</sup>, usually inflicted on none but the vilest and lowest of Malefactors. In Consideration of this meritorious Goodness of his, which he engaged, before the World began, thus to manifest, the most High established with him

<sup>e</sup> Gal. iv. 4.

<sup>f</sup> Phil. ii. 8.

a Covenant of Grace and Favour, by which *all Power in Heaven and Earth was given him*<sup>a</sup>; and Provision was made, that whoever should sincerely repent of the Sins which he had committed, and throw himself on the promised Mercy of God; whether as more obscurely notified before the Redeemer's Incarnation, or more clearly afterwards; taking the Word of Truth for the Law of his Life, and faithfully endeavouring to obey it, should not only have Pardon for his past Transgressions, however heinous, but the Assistance of the divine Spirit to preserve him from future ones: that a kind Providence should turn every Thing to his Good, which befell him in this World, and endless Felicity be his Portion in the next. But then it was also denounced, that whoever should either slight these Offers when duly made; or, professing to accept them, live unsuitably to them, Christ should be of no Benefit to such; they should remain in their Sins, with this heavy Aggravation of their Guilt, that they had rejected the Counsel of God for their Salvation; and when *Light was come into the World, loved Darknes rather than Light, because their Deeds were evil*<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xxxviii. 18.<sup>b</sup> John iii. 19. \*

This is, in brief, the Doctrine of Christ crucified. The main Parts of it, you see, are two: God's Goodness to us, and our Duty to him: and if either be omitted, Men are not *taught as the Truth is in Jesus*<sup>1</sup>. Insisting on moral Duties only, is overlooking the greatest of all Duties, Piety. Insisting on the Duties of natural Religion only, is injuriously despising those of Revelation, which the same Authority hath enjoined. And laying before Men all the Commandments of God, only omitting to say, how they shall be enabled to perform them, and how they shall procure their Performances, faulty as the best of them are, to be accepted, is failing them in Points of the most absolute Necessity.

But then, on the other Hand, speaking of Nothing, but Christ and his Grace, is concealing what *the Grace of God appeared unto all Men to teach them: that denying Ungodliness and worldly Lusts, they should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World*<sup>2</sup>. It is not therefore naming Christ ever so often, or exalting his Compassion to the fallen Race of Adam ever so much, or describing his dreadful Sufferings ever so movingly, that is preaching

<sup>1</sup> Eph. iv. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Tit. ii. 11, 12,

him as we ought, if all be not directed to make us become like him. His own Sermon on the Mount is almost entirely filled with Precepts of Duty; of the common Duties of common Life. And so may other Sermons too, yet be truly Christian, even without mentioning Christ expressly, provided the Necessity of his Aid and his Merits be understood throughout them; and the great Design of his coming, the Reformation of the Hearts and Lives of Men, be closely pursued in them. Thus then judge of our Discourses: and, which is of more Importance, thus judge of your own Improvement. It is neither talking nor thinking highly of Christ, nor being affected in the tenderest Manner with his bitter Passion and dying Love, that constitutes a Believer in him, such as he will finally own: but *herein may we have Boldness in the Day of Judgement, if, as he was, so are we in this World*<sup>1</sup>.

Yet still the Sacrifice of him, *as a Lamb without Blemish*<sup>m</sup>, for our Sins, the Need we had of it, and the Benefits we receive from it, are such capital and indispensable Articles, that every Preacher, who doth not frequently return to them, is without Excuse: and every

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iv. 17.

<sup>m</sup> 1 Pet. i. 19.



Professor of Christianity, who doth not *live by the Faith of the Son of God, who loved him, and gave himself for him, frustrates his Grace*<sup>a</sup>, and will *come short of his Glory*<sup>b</sup>. Accordingly, though St. Paul himself hath considerable Parts of Chapters, in which little, if any Thing, is said of our Saviour ; yet all prepares the Way for introducing him again ; all points our Eye to him ; all makes Part of that Building, *the Corner Stone of which is Jesus Christ*<sup>c</sup>.

Having thus explained, what *preaching Christ crucified* is, I proceed to shew,

II. Why this Doctrine was *to the Jews a Stumbling-block, and to the Greeks Foolishness* : which the Words of the Text, when unfolded, will tell us plainly. *The Jews require a Sign, and the Greeks seek after Wisdom,*

The former had been delivered from the Bondage of *Egypt by Signs and Wonders, by a mighty Hand and a stretched out Arm*<sup>d</sup>. A glorious Appearance of God upon Mount Sinai had accompanied the Promulgation of their Law : his visible Presence had dwelt with them, first in the Tabernacle, then in the Temple ; his miraculous Interpositions had

<sup>a</sup> Gal. ii. 20, 21.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. iii. 23.

<sup>c</sup> Eph. ii. 20,

<sup>d</sup> Exod. iv. 34. v. 15.

given, preserved, and restored to them the Land of *Canaan*, with much earthly Prosperity. These Blessings had so powerfully struck the Imaginations of a gross and carnal People, that they paid in general but little Attention to any that were not of a temporal Nature. And therefore whenever their Prophets foretold the Coming of the promised Redeemer, they were obliged, unless they would have their Predictions despised and forgotten, to describe him in Terms, literally denoting worldly Grandeur: as *ruling in the Midst of his Enemies, judging among the Heathen*, and *higher than the Kings of the Earth*. They did however join to these Descriptions such Circumstances, as sufficiently determined their Words to a spiritual Meaning. But still the other, being far more agreeable, was always uppermost in the Thoughts of the *Jews*: and they would image to themselves the expected Son of *David*, as a mighty Conqueror, who should prove himself the true Messiah by supernatural Assistances from above, enabling him to exert a more than human Force against the Nations, which held them in Subjection, and extend the *Jewish* Empire over the Globe.

† Ps. cx. 2, 6,

• Ps. lxxxix. 27, 28.

In this Sense it was, that they *required a Sign*<sup>†</sup>. Other Signs of his Mission our Saviour had shewn without Number: but still they demand to *see a Sign from Heaven*<sup>‡</sup>. Every Miracle is a Sign from Heaven, had they considered rightly. But the Sign, on which their Hearts were set, was that in the Book of *Daniel*: when the *Son of Man* should come with the *Clouds of Heaven*, and be brought near to the *Ancient of Days*; and have given to him *Dominion and Glory, and a Kingdom, that all People, Nations and Languages should serve him*<sup>§</sup>. Our Saviour observed their Mistake, and told them, that the Sign, which they desired, should indeed be *given*, but *not to that Generation*: that the principal Evidence, to be afforded them, was *the Sign, of the Prophet Jonas*<sup>‡</sup>: the Resurrection of *Jesus* the third Day from the Grave, as *Jonas* rose from the Depth of the Sea. To following Ages farther Signs were to be vouchsafed in their Order: the Dominion, which they expected to see established at once, was designed to take Place

† And a Sign of this Sort they expected, even when the Temple was burnt by the *Romans*. For that very Day a false Prophet assured the People, *ὡς ὁ Θεὸς ἐπὶ τὸ ἔργον ἀναστῆναι καὶ λυσιτελεῖν, δίδοντας τὰ σημεῖα τῆς σωτηρίας*. Joseph. B. I. l. 6. c. 5. §. 2. Ed. Haverc. In a few Lines after, he styles this, *προσμένει τὴν ἀπὸ τοῦ Θεοῦ βοήθειαν*.

‡ Matth. xvi. 1. Mark viii. 11. Luke xi. 16.

§ Dan. vii. 13, 14.

‡ Matth. xii. 39.

by Degrees, over the Souls and Consciences of Men, not their Bodies and Fortunes merely : and in this noblest Sense, *the Kingdoms of this World were to become the Kingdoms of our Lord and of his Christ*<sup>1</sup>. But at Length the Time will come for a yet more awful Display of his regal Power, in the last Judgement : and then shall they, who were so prematurely impatient for a Sign from Heaven, *see, before they wish it, the Sign of the Son of Man coming in the Clouds, with Power and great Glory*<sup>2</sup>.

But such Representations were likely to have little Effect on such Minds. One, who should *at that Time restore again the Kingdom to Israel*<sup>3</sup>, was what the whole People wanted. And when they not only beheld the Meanness of our Saviour's Appearance, and heard the Meekness of his Doctrine, but saw how carefully he avoided the Opportunities of obtaining an earthly Kingdom, the leading Part of the Nation immediately denied him. But when he was arraigned and condemned, and suffered the Death of a Slave, then the Faith, even of his Apostles, almost died with him. *We trusted, say two of his Disciples, as if now all Hope was at an End, we trusted, that it had*

<sup>1</sup> Rev. xi. 15.<sup>2</sup> Matth. xxiv. 30.<sup>3</sup> Acts i. 6.

*been he which should have redeemed Israel<sup>b</sup>. It is true, they recovered themselves: but the greater Part of the Jews did not: and a crucified Redeemer continues a Stumbling-block to them; or, in the Words of Simeon, a Sign spoken against, set for the Fall and Rising again of many in Israel<sup>c</sup>: indeed for the utter Fall of that Church and Nation, till the Season foretold shall come, for which Providence hath left Room, by the wonderful Preservation of this one and only People distinct from all others for so many Ages, when by looking on him whom they have pierced, and mourning<sup>d</sup>, they shall rise again, and be as Life from the dead<sup>e</sup>.*

As for the *Greeks*, or *Gentiles*, they did not object to the Gospel, that the Authority of it wanted the Proof of Signs from Heaven; but that the Preaching of it wanted the Recommendation of what they called *Wisdom*. Neither the Manner of the Apostles Teaching was adorned with that plausible Oratory, of which they were so fond; which soothed the Ears, and entertained the Imagination; which could make a bad Cause victorious, and a good one suspected: nor yet was the Matter of their Discourse made up of curious Specula-

<sup>b</sup> Luke xxiv. 21.  
John xix. 37.

<sup>c</sup> Luke ii. 34.  
<sup>e</sup> Rom. xi. 15.

<sup>d</sup> Zech. xii. 10.

tions, abstruse Points in Philosophy debated with Acuteness, Theories, built upon slender Foundations to great Heights, then attacked with subtle Objections, and defended with more subtle Refinements. These were the Delights of the learned *Greeks*: who, as *St. Paul* and indeed their own Writers observe particularly of the *Athenians*, *spent their Time in Nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new Thing*<sup>1</sup>. Immediately therefore when he had begun to preach in that City, they apply to him with great Eagerness: *May we know, what this new Doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is?* But when they found no such Gratification of their Fancy as they expected; but a grave Reproof of their favourite Superstitions, a serious Call to Repentance, a solemn Denunciation of a future Recompence; and the Foundation of these disagreeable Doctrines laid in a mere Fact, which was contrary to all their Schemes and Systems, that *God would judge the World in Righteousness by that Man, whom he had ordained, whereof he had given Assurance to all Men, in that he had raised him from the dead: some, we read, mocked; and of those, who said more civilly, that they would bear him*

<sup>1</sup> Acts xvii. 21.

<sup>2</sup> Verse 19.

*again of that Matter<sup>h</sup>, we have no Cause to believe, that many did. Nor would the principal Romans afford to our holy Faith more Attention. For when St. Paul was arguing before Agrippa, being a Jew, from the Prophets, that Christ was to suffer and rise again; Festus, the Governor, instantly interrupted him: Paul, thou art beside thyself; much Learning doth make thee mad<sup>i</sup>.*

This was the Treatment, which Men, *wise in their own Conceits<sup>k</sup>*, and bigotted to their own Opinions, gave the Gospel of Christ. Its Doctrines had Nothing amusing to Minds full of trifling Curiosity: its Precepts had many Things disgusting to human Sensuality and Pride: its Proofs were inconsistent with their prevailing Notions. So it was rejected without Examination by Persons, *whom the Irony of Job suits perfectly well: no Doubt, but ye are the People: and Wisdom shall die with you<sup>l</sup>*. It ought to surprize no one, that this Sort of Men, who have always been too common in the World, and never more than now, should scorn Christianity: while they continue such as they are, they cannot embrace it.

<sup>h</sup> Acts xvii. 31, 32.    <sup>i</sup> Acts xxvi. 23, 24.    <sup>k</sup> Rom. xii. 16.  
<sup>l</sup> Job xii. 2.

But, God be thanked, there have ever been some of more equitable Dispositions : and to these it hath constantly appeared in that Light, which the Text expresses,

III. *But unto them, which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the Power of God and the Wisdom of God.* They who would suffer the Voice of Reason and Revelation to call upon them, and would attend to the Call, quickly discovered, under the Meanness of Christ's Appearance, divine Power; and under the Plainness of his Doctrine, divine Wisdom.

The *Jews* had no Cause to expect military Exploits, miraculous Victories, and outward Splendor in their Messiah. Their own Prophets had foretold, that he was to *come to them lowly and meek<sup>m</sup>; to be despised and rejected of Men, to pour out his Soul unto Death an Offering for Sin, and make Intercession for the Transgressors<sup>n</sup>.* Of other Sorts of Miracles they had many more, performed by him and his Disciples, than by *Moses* and the Prophets. If his Death, for Want of knowing the Scriptures, appeared an Objection; his rising again, and Ascension into Heaven, was a full Proof of his Authority. If he brought them no Deliverance

<sup>m</sup> Zech. ix. 9. Matth. xxi. 5.

<sup>n</sup> If. liii.



from their temporal Enemies; yet he freed them from infinitely more formidable ones, from Sin and Guilt and the Wrath of God: and instead of a short-lived Tyranny over the Nations of the Earth, he obtained for them an eternal Triumph over Death and Hell; and *made them Kings and Priests unto God, to reign with him for ever and ever*°. Thus was he, in much the most important Sense, *the Power of God unto Salvation*†: and his real Greatness exceeded all that they looked for, unspeakably more, than his visible Appearance fell beneath it.

As to the Defect of that Wisdom, which the *Greeks* required in the Gospel: it had not indeed *the Wisdom of this World*, or of the vain *Disputers of this World*‡, who *professing themselves to be wise became Fools*†: but, void as it appears of Argumentation and Ornament, every single Truth, that can lead Men to Virtue and Happiness, is taught in it much more fully and convincingly, than in all the preceding Institutions either of Philosophy or Religion. The Being, Attributes and Providence of God, the Apostles proved, were *clearly seen, being*

° Rev. i. 6. v. 10. xx. 6 xxii. 5.  
 † 1 Cor. i. 20. ‡ Rom. i. 22.

p Rom. i. 16.

*understood by the Things that were made*: the Nature and Obligation of Piety and Morals, the Forgiveness of Sins upon Repentance, the inward Assistance of divine Grace, the future Happiness of the good, and Punishment of the bad, these Things they did not ingeniously harangue upon, after the beloved Manner of the *Greeks*, and leave them in the same Uncertainty in which they found them, but gave for their Assertions concerning them, the irrefragable Testimony of Miracles which must proceed from the Almighty; and some of them such as, in their Opinion, even the Almighty was unable to perform. For that *God himself should raise the dead, was thought a Thing incredible with them*. But as no just Reasoning can shew it to be impossible, it is more certainly his Work for being beyond our Comprehension. And this is that undeniable *Demonstration of the Spirit and of Power*, which infinitely excells all *the enticing Words of Man's Wisdom*, not only in the Strength of its Evidence, but the Efficacy of its Influence too. For after the deepest Philosophers, and most florid Orators had wearied themselves for Ages

• Rom. i. 20.

• Acts xxvi. 8.

• 1 Cor. ii. 4.

in framing elaborate Discourses about Religion and Virtue, without being able to set up the true Profession of either, so much as in a single Village; the unlearned Disciples of Christ laid, in a few Years, such Foundations of both throughout the World, as have supported them to this Day, and ever will. *For the Foolishness of God is wiser than Men, and the Weakness of God is stronger than Men* \*.

Since therefore the Whole of the Gospel is so firmly proved, and most Parts of it so evidently rational, and no Part of it evidently otherwise; be we ever so incapable of penetrating into the Depths of some Doctrines, and the Reasons of some Proceedings, yet well may it become us to think, that he, who sees all Things, may easily see many, which we do not; and to reverence *the Wisdom of God in a Mystery, even the hidden Wisdom which he ordained before the World, unto our Glory* \*. Whether Sinners could be saved no other Way, than by the Death of his Son; or why, if they could, he hath preferred that to the rest; we have no Right to ask. What he hath chosen, we might be sure is best, even did no Reason at all for it appear. But he hath made known

several to us : some clearly, some *as through a Glass darkly*<sup>1</sup> ; but the obscurest of them all to be contemplated with awful Respect.

By his eternal Son, God made the World, and hath administered it from the Beginning. He therefore was plainly the fit Person to conduct the most important of all its Affairs, the Recovery of Mankind from Sin and Misery ; *that in all Things*, as the Apostle expresses it, *he might have the Pre-eminence, and in him all Fulness dwell*<sup>2</sup>. In Order to recover and reform Men, he must instruct them : and doing it himself was unquestionably the most efficacious Method. But how must he come to do it ? Had he appeared in a Station of Power and Wealth ; many would have been ready to pay Court to him : but few, to obey his Precepts from the Heart. Even in his low Estate, some followed him a while, merely for the Loaves. And how much more Hypocrisy, a very improper Qualification for the Kingdom of Righteousness, would there have been amongst his Hearers, had the Circumstances of the Teacher been more inviting ! And how unfurmountable a Disgrace might they have

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xiii. 12,

<sup>2</sup> See Col. i. 13—20.

brought upon his whole Undertaking in its very Infancy, instead of the Honour and Support which it received from the unimpeached Integrity of its first afflicted Professors !

But further: Nothing enforces Précepts, like Example. Now what Example could the Messias have set, in the Midst of worldly Pomp and Grandeur ? A very useful one certainly in some Points to some of his chief Officers, and others about his Person : but removed from the Sight, and unsuitable to the Condition of the Bulk of Mankind : whereas in the Sort of Life, which he chose, an extremely public, though a mean one, he was a daily and familiar Pattern to all Men, of the most general and difficult Virtues : of Condescension, Disinterestedness, and Delight to do Good ; of Indifference to worldly Enjoyments, Composedness under Contempt, Meekness under malicious Provocations, and Resignation to God's Will under the bitterest Sufferings of every Kind. These Things, most of us, in one Part or another of our Pilgrimage, have Need to practise : and we find them so hard to learn, that the Encouragement of his having done and born much more than he requires of us, and the Assurance,

ance, that *having been tempted himself*, he will *succour us when we are tempted*<sup>a</sup>; will, in a Time of Trial, be Blessings unspeakable.

Then consider besides, how great a Confirmation his Humility and Patience add to the other Proofs of his Authority. A Claim to worldly Power, by Virtue of a divine Commission, raises Apprehensions of unfair Design. But when a Person, declaring himself to come from Heaven, renounces every Thing on Earth, which Men usually hold dear; when he shews by plain Facts, that his Errand is, *not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to lay down his Life for his Followers*<sup>b</sup>; when he foresees and foretells, that his Doctrine will bring him to the shamefullest and cruellest of Deaths, and yet goes on, and meets it calmly: here is the strongest Evidence of Sincerity; and the most engaging Motive to love him, who hath so loved us, as to seal with his Blood the Truth of the good Tidings, which he came to bring us.

But there is yet one Reason more of our Saviour's Passion, of which if we see not distinctly the full Force, we see however, that it may be of infinite Force. Mankind are

<sup>a</sup> Heb. ii. 18.

<sup>b</sup> Matth. xx. 28.

Sinners. Our first Parents were so : we have all been so, few of us think to what a Degree : and close upon Sin follow Weakness and Guilt. The good Instructions and Example of our blessed Lord have indeed, without any Thing farther, a powerful Tendency to reform us, if we have Strength to reform ourselves, on seeing that we ought. But what can they do for us, if we have not ; which Experience too often proves to be our Case ? Or supposing them to do it ever so effectually, still it would be true, that we have been Sinners ; have dishonoured our Maker, and broken his Laws : and who but himself can tell, what Satisfaction the Holiness of his Nature and the Honour of his Government may demand to be made for such Offences ? Mere Sorrow for having done amiss very seldom frees us in this World from the ill Consequences of Transgression : and what Security can we have, that it will in the next ? Living well for the future, is making no Amends for having sinned before : for it is no more than our Duty, if we had never sinned at all : besides that what Men call living well, especially Men destitute of the Spirit of Christ, is mixed with innumerable and grievous Faults. In this State of Things

Things then, where is the Certainty, that our Sins would or could be forgiven, or the Authority of God kept up in the Eyes of his Creation otherwise, than by punishing the guilty? And if that was to be done, the whole Race of Mankind must fall under the Sentence. Here it was therefore that his unsearchable Wisdom interposed, who, alone knowing the fittest Means of reconciling Justice with Goodness, pitched upon this: that, as a terrifying Monument of the ill Desert of Iniquity, his beloved Son should in our Nature, and in our Stead, suffer Death; and for an eternal Demonstration of the divine Bignity, his undergoing it voluntarily should be rewarded with the highest Glory to himself; and with Pardon, and Grace, and Life eternal to all who made their humble Claim to them, by Repentance; Faith, and Love. Thus did God shew himself *just, and the Justifier of them which believe in Jesus*: thus did *Mercy and Truth meet together; Righteousness and Peace kiss each other*<sup>1</sup>.

Affuredly so extraordinary a Method would never have been taken without extraordinary Need of it. That we should fully discern the

<sup>1</sup> Rom. iii. 26.

<sup>2</sup> Psal. lxxxv. 10.



Need, is no Way necessary: it suffices that God did. Our Concern is no more, than to accept Salvation, his own Gift, on his own Terms: renouncing all Merit in ourselves, laying hold, by a lively Faith, on the Merits of our Redeemer's Obedience, thanking our heavenly Father from the Bottom of our Souls, for sending his blessed Son into the World, and esteeming most highly the Christian Creed, the Christian Worship, the Christian Sacraments. *God forbid, then, that we should glory in any Thing, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ*: or ever be ashamed of that, for all the Scorn and Ridicule of a thoughtless and profane World. But God forbid also, that while we profess to believe on him, we should *crucify him to ourselves afresh, and put him and his Religion to Shame*, by transgressing and neglecting any Obligation of Piety towards our Maker, our Saviour, our Sanctifier; of Justice or Goodness towards our Fellow-Creatures; of Humility, Sobriety, Temperance, Chastity, in the Government of ourselves. For in vain do we call him Lord, unless we do the Things which he commands

\* Gal. vi. 14.

\* Heb. vi. 6.

\* Luke vi. 46.

# S E R M O N V I I I

us : in vain do we trust in his Goodness, unless we *present our Souls and Bodies* acceptable unto God : in vain do we imagine our Peace is made through him in Heaven, unless on Earth we *follow Peace with all Men, and that universal Holiness of Life, without which no Man shall see the Lord*¹.

Rom. xii. 1.

¹ Heb. xii. 14.



## S E R M O N    V I I I .

I COR. XV. 19.

*If in this Life only we have Hope in Christ, we  
are of all Men most miserable.*

**I**N the Words preceding these, the Apostle, after setting forth, in several Particulars, the Evidence of our blessed Lord's Resurrection, goes on to prove from it the important Doctrine of a general Resurrection to eternal Life.

It may seem to us now very strange, that any, who called themselves Christians, could make the least Doubt of so known and essential an Article of the Christian Faith. But if we consider the State, in which the World was then, we shall wonder no longer, that, of professed Believers, there should be some, who did not believe the dead would be raised again. Among the *Jews*, the Pharisees indeed were firmly persuaded of this Truth. But the Sadducees, a considerable Sect, though not for the  
Numbers,

Numbers, yet for the Rank of those who embraced it, rejected the Doctrine of a future Life intirely ; and looked on the Resurrection, as a Thing peculiarly incredible. Notwithstanding which, as they held a present Providence that rules the World, they might many of them, reading the Predictions of the Old Testament concerning the Messiah, seeing the Accomplishment of them in the Person of *Jesus*, and struck with the Miracles, which he and his Followers performed, be persuaded, on the Whole, that he was sent from God ; and yet be very backward to understand what he taught, when it contradicted their former Prejudices. But the Heathens' were still more likely to act thus. For amongst them, even the steadiest Believers of a future State all disbelieved the raising again of the Body, as a Thing both impossible and unfit : for their Men of Learning thought it only the Prison of the Soul ; which must always be an Impediment, instead of a Help to it. Suppose then Christianity preached, with proper Evidence, to such Persons, as these : they would receive very gladly what was said of the Remission of Sins, the Obligations to Virtue, the future Life of the Soul, happy or miserable, according

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ing to every one's Deeds. But when the Resurrection of the Body was taught, there must evidently be great Danger, either that they would reject the Whole of the Gospel, because of this one seemingly incredible Part; as the Philosophers at *Athens* did, who are mentioned in the *Acts*; or else, that they would so interpret this Part, as to reconcile it with their pre-conceived Opinion. Accordingly, the History of the Church informs us, that several, in the first Ages, thought our Saviour died and rose again, not in Reality but in miraculous Appearance only. And others had equally wild Fancies in other Articles of Religion: as indeed it was very natural for them to entertain surprising Imaginations, about Matters so intirely new to them: especially when, in all Likelihood, great Numbers were converted to the Belief of Christianity in general, by seeing or being informed of the Miracles wrought in its Favour; who perhaps had no Opportunity, for some Time, of hearing the particular Doctrines of it explained so distinctly, by those who thoroughly understood them, as to be set right in every Point. And this may possibly have been one chief Reason of the many strange  
Notions,

Notions, that we find some of the early Christians embraced.

Besides, they might the more easily be mistaken, in the Case before us, on this Account : that the Apostles, imitating the Language, already in Use concerning the *Jewish* Proselytes, expressed the Change, which Christianity made in the Tempers and Condition of Men, by the Phrases of *dying to Sin, being buried with Christ in Baptism, and rising again to Newness of Life*. The ignorant or prejudiced might hastily conclude from hence, that no other rising again was intended to be taught : and that therefore *the Resurrection was past already*, as we are told by our Apostle, some affirmed<sup>a</sup>.

Now this Error, if it comprehended the Denial of a future State, subverted the main Purpose of Christianity : which was, influencing the World to Piety and Virtue, from the Expectation of that State<sup>b</sup>. And where only the future Life of the Body was denied ; even that, by Consequence, made the Gospel

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. ii. 18.

<sup>b</sup> Origen, Com. in Matth. xxii. 23. tom. 17. p. 811. insists, that the Apostle writes here against Persons disbelieving a future Life ; and that his Argum<sup>ts</sup> are not conclusive against those, who disbelieve a Resurrection only. I have endeavoured to shew the contrary in what follows.

*of no Effect.* For if the Resurrection of it was a Thing impossible, which all, who rejected it, seem to have held; then the Resurrection of Christ was a Thing impossible. Yet this was the main Fact, to which the Apostles were appointed to bear Witness, and lay the Stress of their Cause upon it. If therefore they erred here, they deserved Belief in Nothing: their *Preaching was vain, and the Faith of their Followers vain also*<sup>c</sup>. Or, supposing Christianity had still sufficient Evidence left; yet, in another Sense, it would be *vain*, that is, ineffectual to the Forgiveness of our Sins; the very Foundation of which is, that *he, who was delivered for our Offences, rose again for our Justification*<sup>a</sup>. If therefore he is not risen, we are not justified: it appears not, that his Death was more than that of a common Man; he continues under the Power of it, not able to help himself, much less others; and human Kind remains, as it was before, liable to future Punishment, and uncertain of future Reward. This is the Apostle's Reasoning, just before the Text: *If the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your Faith is vain, ye are yet in your Sins*<sup>c</sup>. He goes on: *Then they also, which are fallen asleep in Christ,*

<sup>a</sup> 1 Cor. xvi. 14.<sup>a</sup> Rom. iv. 25.<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 16, 17.



*are perished*<sup>f</sup>. Neither dying in the Christian Faith, nor dying for it, can do them Good with Respect to a future Life. And *if in this Life only we have Hope in Christ*, as very probably some of the Sadducee Converts might think, *we are of all Men most miserable*: or, as the original Word strictly signifies, *most pitiable*.

Now, of what Persons this is said, and on what Account it is true of them, a great Doubt hath been raised.

Some have gone so far, as to affirm, that, in the present World, Brutes are happier than Men; and bad Men than good. But of the former of these Points, at least, plainly, the Apostle saith Nothing. Others understand him ~~to~~ mean, that the Condition of moral Heathens in this Life, is better than that of Christians, because of the difficult Duties, and severe Restraints, which are peculiar to the latter. But evidently he doth not say at all, what the Condition of any Persons actually is: but only what it would be, if they had not the Hope of hereafter to support them. And therefore, with that Hope, good Men, and good Christians, may, even at present, be happier than others: though it were true, that, without it, they would be more miserable. Not

<sup>f</sup> Verse 18.

that he meant to affirm, that they would be more miserable, were the Prospect of a better State out of the Question. Far from it.

Read but the Description, which he gives of the vicious Part of the Heathen World, in the Beginning of his Epistle to the *Romans*: where he tells us, *God had given them over to a reprobate Mind, to do those Things, which are not convenient; being filled with all Unrighteousness, Fornication, Wickedness, Covetousness, Maliciousness, Envy, Murder, Strife, Deceit, Malignity; without Understanding, without natural Affection, implacable, unmerciful*<sup>a</sup>. Could he possibly think this a happy State? He appeals to their own Experience for the contrary: *What Fruit had ye then in those Things, whereof ye are now ashamed*<sup>b</sup>? Heathen Vices then he did not think at all conducive to the Enjoyment of Life: nor doth he ever intimate, that Heathen Virtues were more so, than Christian Graces. So far as they are both the same, they must have the same Effects: and there are few Cases, if any, in which the Gospel, rightly understood, is more strict than Reason, duly cultivated: besides that those Precepts of it, which are the strictest of all, perhaps contribute the most of all to our Hap-

<sup>a</sup> Rom. i. 28—31.

<sup>b</sup> Rom. vi. 21.

pincfs here ; by ftriking at the Root, from whence our Faults and Uneafineffes fpring, and requiring of us that inward Self-government, which is the only Means of true Self-enjoyment. There is alfo another exceeding great Advantage of Chriftian Virtue ; that the Gofpel affords fuch peculiar Evidences and Means of God's Grace and Affiftance, in Proportion as we need it, to do every Thing, to which he calls us ; that though we were not to add the Confideration of his rewarding us hereafter, yet Believers would undoubtedly be capable of going through the fame Difficulties with much greater Spirit, Comfort, and Succès, than other Men. And accordingly our Saviour affures us, that *his Yoke is eafy, and his Burthen light*<sup>1</sup>. And St. Paul yet more diftinctly afferts, that *Godlinefs, meaning certainly Chriftian Godlinefs, is profitable unto all Things, having Promise of the Life that now is, as well as that which is to come*<sup>k</sup>.

But of whom can it be then, that he fpeaks, when he faith fo exprefly, *If in this Life only we have Hope in Chrift, we are of all Men moft miferable*? I anfwer, of the very fame, whom he denoted, by the word *We*, the laft Time he ufed it, but a few Lines before : of the Witneffes of

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xi. 30.

<sup>k</sup> 1 Tim. iv. 8. •

Christ's Resurrection, and the Preachers of his Gospel; who then suffered many Afflictions on Account of it in this Life; and were wretched indeed, if they had no Prospect of being the better for it in another: as were certainly in Proportion also their first Followers. For in that Age, *all that lived godly in Christ Jesus suffered Persecution*<sup>1</sup>; and knew, as the Apostle reminds them, that *they were appointed thereto*<sup>m</sup>.

Not those Duties therefore, which always belonged to the Christian Profession, but those Sufferings, which then attended it, were the Reason, that, had not the Hopes of a better Life through Christ supported them, they had been *the most miserable of all Men*. And this appears more plainly yet from the Sequel of the Discourse; where, resuming this Part of the Subject again, he doth not argue, *If the dead rise not*, why do we live soberly and righteously; as he doubtless ought to have done, if Sobriety and Righteousness were prejudicial in this World; but, *If the dead rise not, why stand we in Jeopardy every Hour? What advantageth it me, that I have fought with Beasts at Ephesus, if the dead rise not?*<sup>o</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 2 Tim. iii. 12.      <sup>m</sup> 1 Thess. iii. 3.      <sup>n</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 30.  
<sup>o</sup> Verse 32.

He doth indeed, after this, immediately subjoin, *Let us eat and drink; for To-morrow we die.* But these Words, in the Passage of *Isaiah*<sup>p</sup>, from whence they are taken, stand in Opposition, not to Temperance, but to Mortification and Fasting. And here they do not mean, let us indulge Debauchery and Excess: but let us not deprive ourselves, if we can hope for no future Advantage from it, of the innocent Satisfaction and Comforts of Life, while it lasts. The Expression may indeed sometimes be used in a bad Sense: but it is most frequently used in a good one; as, to mention no more, where our Saviour saith of himself, that *he came eating and drinking*<sup>q</sup>; and where St. Paul pleads, *Have we not Power to eat and to drink*<sup>r</sup>? His Intention therefore was only to say: If there be no Resurrection, if Christ be not risen, if his Religion can be of no Service to us hereafter, let us not make ourselves miserable for the Sake of it here: let us not spend our Lives, as he elsewhere declares he did his, for the Service of the Gospel, in *Weariness and Painfulness, in Hunger and Thirst, in Cold and Nakedness*<sup>s</sup>; but, renouncing what only brings on us fruitless Sufferings,

<sup>p</sup> Is. xxii. 13.<sup>q</sup> Matth. xi. 19.<sup>r</sup> 1 Cor. ix. 4.<sup>s</sup> 2 Cor. xi. 27.

enjoy our Ease like other wise Men. These Consequences he knew would startle those, whom he pressed with them ; and shew them the Necessity, either of abandoning their Faith entirely, which he was certain they would not, or of admitting the Resurrection for one Article of it.

Upon the Whole then it appears, that the Persecutions, not the Duties of Christianity, were what would have made the Believers in it miserable, had the Hope, which it gave them, been confined to this Life. And indeed, though possibly God might have appointed, that doing our Duty should be attended of Necessity with greater Uneasiness and less Pleasure here, than transgressing it : yet such a Constitution of Things would have made his moral Perfections, and his Providence, much more doubtful ; for present Appearances would then have been altogether against them : and this would greatly have discouraged the Practice of Virtue ; amongst all Men indeed, but especially in those many Ages and Countries, which had no clear Knowledge, whatever Glimmerings they might have, of a future State.

It is true, some excellent Persons have imagined, that the fewer Advantages they allowed

to Virtue here in their pious Discourses and Writings, the more fully they should prove it must be rewarded hereafter: and therefore have strenuously pleaded for the present Happiness of Vice. But we ought not to state Things otherwise than they are, in order to draw useful Conclusions: and no Good will come of it. Being persuaded, that Wickedness is happier at present, may incline as many to think God is not displeased with it; as any Reasonings from his Actions will incline to think he is, and that some of Things be contrived by his Providence to favour bad Men more than good now: this may well raise a Doubt, whether the same Providence will so certainly do just the contrary in the next World. And a very small Hope of escaping Punishment there, will effectually determine Men to live as they ought not, if it be acknowledged their Interest here. Or supposing it ever so plain, that if Virtue, on the Whole, suffer in this Life, it must be rewarded in another; yet what we call Virtue in ourselves will be far from intitling us to such Reward. And supposing any Creature faultlessly obedient, the Justice of God will be bound to bestow on it no greater and no longer Reward, than will barely make Amends for its Sufferings. And if we argue  
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from his Goodness ; his doing ever so much for it on Earth, will be no Manner of Objection against his doing still more in Heaven. For that will be only carrying on a Scheme, which he hath already begun, and therefore, we may justly presume, he will complete. If a moral and religious Behaviour be, according to the natural Course of Things in this World, beneficial to Men, and a wicked and impious one hurtful ; as I hope you have often heard them proved to be : then we have clear Evidence of Fact, that God, who hath made them so, doth actually reward the one and punish the other. And though at present his Recompences are neither exactly proportioned, nor without Exception constant : yet, as we see many Reasons, that may justly occasion this, and cannot but acknowledge there may be many more ; there arises, from the Whole, great foundation for Hope, that the plain Distinction, which he made already, will be yet more perfectly made in a proper time. So that there is no Need for us to apprehend we must necessarily be miserable here, in order to be happy hereafter ; or to lie under the Imputation of depreciating Virtue, and making it good for Nothing to its Votaries, in this World, in Order to secure it a Retribution in



the next. Reason doth not direct to that Method: Revelation hath not taken it: and the Teachers and Professors of Christianity should avoid exposing themselves to a Charge, from which Christianity itself is perfectly free.

But still, were we to speak of Virtue, as always its own Reward here, and attaining its End sufficiently in the Compass of this narrow Life; that would be an Extreme on the other Hand, and a very pernicious one; whatever great Names have countenanced it, some with good Designs, and some with bad. Such extravagant Praises of moral Beauty and Excellency will seldom have any other Effect, where they have most, than raising an Enthusiasm for it, that will be little more than notional, or an Affectation of it, that will be nothing more than Talk. And with the cooler Part of Mankind, attempting to persuade them of the contrary to what, in many Cases, they see and feel, is losing all Credit; and making every Thing that is said to the Advantage of right Conduct suspicious, by insisting on more, than can possibly be true.

The real State of the Case is plainly this. A Temper and Behaviour of Piety, Justice, Benevolence, and rational Self-government, is  
fitted

fitted in its Nature to make our Lives here as happy, as we can make them. And therefore, though we had no farther Prospect, our present Interest would, generally speaking, consist in these Things: and would always consist in them, if no particular Circumstances happened, to make Exceptions. But the Misfortune is, that such Circumstances do frequently happen. Some Men have, from their very Constitution, peculiarly strong Propensities to Sin, which give them long and painful Exercise; and, after all, can barely be kept under, not rooted out, let them do what they will. Is this a State of Enjoyment, and its own Reward? Or a State of Warfare, that requires a future Recompence, proportionable to the Sufferings of it, to make it eligible? But others are yet more unhappy. They have added evil Habits to evil Inclinations: and, if they will amend their Ways, must feel deep Remorse for what they have done amiss already; and go through infinite Difficulties to do right for the Time to come, in Contradiction to all their bad Customs, their inflamed Passions, their vicious Friends: must bear great Reproach, perhaps undergo much Loss, in making Reparation for the Injuries they have committed; when the Whole of this might possibly have been avoided,

by

tainty as former Ages were in, whether it could be attained or not, must unquestionably mix great Anxiety with their Expectations; and leave their Circumstances, on the Whole, very pitiable. But God, in his Mercy, hath removed all Doubts from us; not only by express Promises, but an experimental Proof also, of a Resurrection to Life everlasting, in the Person of our blessed Lord: that through him we *might have the strongest Consolation, when we fly for Refuge to lay hold on the Hope set before us: which Hope we have as an Anchor of the Soul, sure and stedfast, and which entereth within the Veil; whither also the Forc-runner is already entered for us, even Jesus*.\*

You cannot but see then, of what great Consequence it is for all wise Men to encourage this Faith, and all good Men to have frequent Recourse to it. For the principal Reason, why we are, most of us, so faulty and so wretched, in this Life is, that we attend so little to the Rewards of another. We ourselves perhaps do not suspect, how little it is. Would God that every one who hears me, would make a diligent Examination, what Share of his Desires, his Hopes, and his Fears, the unseen World takes up; and seriously ask

\* Heb. vi. 18—20.

himself,

himself, whether it can possibly be fit, that the infinitely most important Part of his Condition should be allowed so very much the least Part in his Thoughts.

But then to think of our Condition to good Effect; we must be sure, not to set our Minds more on the Privileges, than the Duties of it; but remember, that as the virtuous would sometimes be the most miserable of Men, if there were no Expectation of Futurity; so the vicious must be always the most miserable, if there be any. Every Promise of the Gospel is a Threatening to them: and the Doctrine of Salvation will only condemn them to severer Punishments. *Let every Man therefore, who hath Hope in Christ, purify himself, even as he is pure<sup>x</sup>. And let every Man who desires to do so, remember, that he can do it only, by a stedfast Belief, that Christ died and rose again on our Account; for this is the Victory that overcometh the World, even our Faith<sup>y</sup>: by an humble Dependance on Grace from above, to be obtained by our Prayers; for we are not sufficient of ourselves to do any Thing<sup>z</sup>: and by a diligent and constant Use of*

<sup>x</sup> 1 John iii. 3.    <sup>y</sup> 1 John v. 4.    <sup>z</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 15.

that Grace, in labouring to perform every Part of our Duty; for we are to *work out our own Salvation, because God worketh in us, both to will and to do*<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Phil. ii. 12, 13

## S E R M O N IX.

MATTH. xii. 31, 32.

*Wherefore I say unto you : All Manner of Sin  
and Blasphemy shall be forgiven unto Men :  
but the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost  
shall not be forgiven unto Men.*

*And whosoever speaketh a Word against the Son  
of Man, it shall be forgiven him : but who-  
soever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall  
not be forgiven him, neither in this World,  
neither in the World to come.*

**T**HES E Words of our blessed Lord  
feldom, if ever, fail to excite a peculiar  
Attention and Alarm in the Minds of all,  
who read or hear them : and the Doctrine,  
which they contain, appears to some, either  
so difficult to be understood, or so improper  
to be admitted ; and fills others with such  
Terrors, or sinks them into such Despon-  
dency ;

dency ; that, for the Sake of great Numbers, it should be well explained from Time to Time. And Men ought to have the Nature of this Crime laid before them, when they are not disturbed within by the Imagination of having committed it. For when they are, the Agitation of their Minds too commonly disqualifies them from judging rightly concerning either the Sense of the Text, or even their own Actions.

Now there are several Sins against the Holy Ghost, mentioned in Scripture ; *Lying to<sup>a</sup>, resisting<sup>b</sup>, tempting<sup>c</sup>, grieving<sup>d</sup>, quenching the Spirit<sup>e</sup>*: yet none of these is ever said to be unpardonable ; and therefore, we may be sure, none of them is so : because, if it had, undoubtedly the Word of God would have given us that Warning in Relation to it: whereas on the contrary, the Text itself, in the plainest Words, assures us, that every Sin is pardonable, excepting one, which is different from all these. If then either the wicked, reflecting on their Guilt, or the innocent, overcome with groundless Fears, are apprehensive, that they have committed the Sin against the Holy Ghost, as

<sup>a</sup> Acts v. 3.

<sup>d</sup> Eph. iv. 30.

<sup>b</sup> Acts vii. 51,

<sup>e</sup> 1 Thess. v. 19.

<sup>c</sup> Acts v. 9.

they

they usually call it, and therefore cannot be forgiven: they should, in the first Place, be asked, or ask themselves, and answer distinctly, what Sin against the Holy Ghost they have committed? What the particular Thing is, that weighs so heavy upon them? For unless it be precisely *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, there is no Pretence for saying, they cannot be forgiven. There are but three Passages in the Bible, that mention this Matter: the Text; Mark iii. 28, 29. and Luke xii. 10: in every one of which, the very same Word, *Blasphemy*, is used; and no other. So that, of whatever Sin else against the divine Spirit they may have been guilty, if they have not been guilty of that, they may undoubtedly be forgiven. And this single Observation, duly attended to, is sufficient to preserve, or even restore, the Quiet of Multitudes. But still too many, for Want of understanding the Nature of the Blasphemy which our blessed Lord here means, may falsely conceive themselves to be chargeable with it: whilst others, of a different Turn, may wonder, or be much offended, at finding so terrible a Denunciation against it: and a third Sort, if they perceive no Danger of actually incurring this Con-

•Vol. I. N demnation,



demnation, may by no Means consider, so seriously as they ought, how near it they may come. I shall therefore endeavour to shew,

I. What the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

II. What is intended by his Declaration, that *it shall not be forgiven, neither in this World, nor that to come.*

III. Why he passes so heavy a Sentence on this one Sin.

IV. What Things do, or do not, approach towards it.

I. What the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost, mentioned by our Saviour, is.

Now the Term *Blasphemy*, in the original Language of the New Testament, whence we have derived it into our own, signifies Nothing else, than speaking evil of any one unjustly. And it is frequently used to denote speaking evil of our Equals; but more peculiarly, of our Superiors; and therefore, most eminently, of God the Father Almighty, his Son and Spirit: to which three alone this Expression is confined in our vulgar Tongue. Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost therefore is speaking irreverently and injuriously of the Holy Ghost: which may be done, by vilifying  
 • either

either his Person, or his Works. But of the former our Saviour doth not speak: for Nothing had happened, which could lead him to it. The *Jews*, whom he was reproving, professed, and had, the highest Veneration for the Spirit of God: therefore they had certainly uttered no personal Reproaches against him: indeed it doth not appear, that they had named him in what gave Rise to the Declaration, made in the Text. But the Case, to lay it before you in the Words of the Gospel, was this. *There was brought to him one possessed with a Devil, blind and dumb; and he healed him: and all the People were amazed, and said, Is not this the Son of David? But when the Pharisees heard it, they said, This Fellow doth not cast out Devils, but by Beelzebub the Prince of the Devils. It follows, And Jesus knew their Thoughts*<sup>1</sup>. Upon which he argued with them, that destroying the Works of the Devil, his Influence over the Bodies and Souls of Men, could not proceed from the Devil himself, for that would be overturning his own Kingdom; but evidently shewed a Power opposite and superior to his: and then he subjoined the Words now under Consideration; which many learned

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xii. 22—25.

Interpreters have understood thus: that such, as were ignorantly led by common Prejudice to speak against Christ, appearing only as a Son of Man; and, taking him for a mere Man, reproached him with being *the Carpenter's Son*<sup>e</sup>, or even *gluttonous and a Wine-bibber, and a Friend of Publicans and Sinners*<sup>h</sup>; might, notwithstanding, come to see their Mistake, and be forgiven: but when he performed Miracles, before their Eyes, to rectify their Opinion, as he had just done then; if they reviled these also, ascribing them to the Agency of the Devil, contrary to all Reason, and perhaps to their own Consciences too; (for thus some understand the Observation, that *Jesus knew their Thoughts*;) this was *adding Sin to Sin*<sup>i</sup>; was in Effect imputing Wickedness to the Holy Spirit of God, by representing what was plainly done by him, as done by an evil Being; and should not be pardoned. Nor can it be denied, but this Interpretation seems to be much confirmed by St. Mark; who observes, that our Saviour gave them this Warning, *because they said, he had an unclean Spirit*<sup>k</sup>.

But still other eminent Men, though they allow, that he *cast out Devils*, as himself ex-

<sup>e</sup> Matth. xiii. 55.  
<sup>i</sup> 1st. xxx. 1.

<sup>h</sup> Matth. xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.  
<sup>k</sup> Mark iii. 30.

pressly affirms<sup>1</sup>, and performed the rest of his wonderful Works, *by the Spirit of God*, which is the same with the Holy Ghost; yet remark very truly, that this Phrase, *the Holy Ghost*, these Words thus joined, in the Gospels and Acts never signify the Power of working Miracles, but often signify the spiritual Gifts, of speaking with Tongues and the like, which the Apostles received: and that accordingly, though they had long before done many Miracles, as well as their Master, we are told notwithstanding in the New Testament, that *the Holy Ghost was not yet given*<sup>m</sup>; but promised, after our blessed Lord's Ascension. From hence then they argue, that conformably to this Manner of speaking, *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost* must mean vilifying, not the miraculous Operations, of which the Spirit was the Author then; but the farther Manifestations of himself, which were soon to follow them; and our Saviour must design in the Text to inform his Opposers, that all they had said, and all they should say, of him, while he remained on Earth, as a *Deceiver of the People*<sup>n</sup> and even one that *had a Devil*<sup>o</sup>, might be forgiven them: but if, when he was gone to the Father;

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xii. 28.      <sup>m</sup> John vii. 39.      <sup>n</sup> John vii. 12.  
<sup>o</sup> Matth. xi. 18. Luke vii. 33.

and the *Comforter*, or Advocate, for so it should be translated, *come*<sup>r</sup>, by supernatural Gifts to convince the World of Sin, because they had not believed on him<sup>a</sup>; if they should go on then to speak evil of these also, <sup>a</sup>their Guilt should never be remitted. And, in Confirmation of this Exposition, they observe<sup>\*</sup> further, that Christ, at his Death, prayed the Father to forgive<sup>r</sup> his Crucifiers, though at the same Time they reviled and derided both him and his Miracles; *he saved others, himself he cannot save; let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the Cross, and we will believe him<sup>a</sup>*: and that, suitably to his Master's Example, St. Peter intreated them afterwards to *repent and be converted, that their Sins might be blotted out<sup>a</sup>*, which therefore was yet possible: but when, they still resisted the Holy Ghost, after these fuller Proofs of his Interposition, *contradicting and blaspheming*; then the Apostles turned from them, as *unworthy of everlasting Life*, and went to the *Gentiles*<sup>b</sup>.

This latter Interpretation, I confess, appears to me the more probable. But, in this they agree: that the Blasphemy, which is pronounced unpardonable, was not speaking evil

<sup>r</sup> John xv. 26.      <sup>a</sup> John xvi. 8, 9.      <sup>\*</sup> Luke xxiii. 34.  
<sup>b</sup> Matth xxvii. 42. Mark xv. 32.      <sup>a</sup> Acts iii. 19.  
 Acts xiii. 45, 46.

of the Person of the Holy Ghost, but of the miraculous Powers which he exerted: and the Difference is only, what miraculous Powers are meant; whether those mighty Works, which our Saviour performed by Means of the divine Spirit, while on Earth; or those Gifts, which were poured forth on Men, after he ascended to Heaven: a Question, easy, no Doubt, to be answered then; but of no Importance to us now.

What we are concerned to remark farther is, that our blessed Lord's Denunciation was pointed, not against such Blasphemy or Evil-speaking, as mere Mistake or Inconsiderateness might lead Men into; but such, as proceeded from wilful and deliberate Wickedness: for with this he charges the Jews, immediately after the Text: *O Generation of Vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good Things? For out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth speaketh*. Nor doth he pass so dreadful a Sentence on the Use of opprobrious Language, concerning Operations of the Spirit, manifested in distant Places or Times; but concerning Miracles performed, or supernatural Gifts exercised, before Mens own Eyes; for that Ad-

w Matth. xli. 34.

vantage they, to whom he spoke, enjoyed. Nor did even they fall under this Condemnation for every hasty Expression of Contempt; but for such, as they continued to utter, after a sufficient Time allowed them to grow cool and serious, and reflect. For when, upon the Apostles receiving the Gift of Tongues, there were some, that *mocking said*, *These Men are full of new Wine*; though it was certainly a blaspheming Saying in itself, and came from a wrong Disposition of Mind, and reflected on a Work of the Holy Ghost done in their own Presence; yet being only a sudden Flight, St. Peter did not impute it as Blasphemy to them, but merely as Rashness of Judgment; and therefore applied himself to convince them of their Mistake, with so good Effect, that 3000 were converted that very Day. On the Whole therefore, the only Persons, whom we have Ground to think guilty of *the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, meant in the Text, are they, who from bad Motives, and, as we say, in cold Blood, revile and rail against such Operations of the divine Spirit, as are performed in their own Presence. Let us now inquire,

II. What is the true Sense of our Saviour's Declaration, that this one Sin shall not

\* Acts ii. 13.

## S E R M O N IX. 201

*be forgiven, neither in this present World, nor that to come.*

Some have apprehended him to mean only, that all passionate and injurious Language on common Occasions shall be considered as mere human Infirmary, that doth not put Men out of a State of Salvation; whereas the like Language concerning the Miracles and Gifts of the Holy Ghost doth: brings them into a Condition of spiritual Death here, which, unless they rise again from it by a particular Repentance, will be followed by eternal Death hereafter. But surely it is taking much too great Liberty; first, by *all Manner of Sin and Blasphemy* to understand only all sinful Evil-speaking about common Matters, though our Saviour hath specified speaking against himself: then to say, that all Evil-speaking about common Matters is consistent with Salvation; and lastly, when the Text affirms peremptorily, that *the Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost*, and that alone, *shall not be forgiven*; to add, unless Men particularly repent of it: a Limitation, for which there is not the least Authority, and which would bring down this Sin to just the same Level with many more. Some again think the Words of our blessed Lord, though



though expressed absolutely, are meant only in Comparison; that all other Sins will be forgiven sooner; and this with the most Difficulty of any. But, though doubtless there are some Instances, especially in the Old Testament, where what is said positively, must be understood comparatively: yet, I think none will be found of that Sort, where the Assertion is made with such great and calm Solemnity, and so circumstantially. Lastly, not a few, observing that in all Writers, the most general Denunciations often admit no small Number of particular Exceptions, conceive, that this before us may'. But then some Foundation must always appear for such Exceptions, either in other Passages of the same or other Writers, concerning the same Matter, or in the Nature of the Thing: and no such Foundation hath yet been shewn in the present Case. Besides, the Declaration, that *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven*, is itself an Exception from a general Rule, that *all Manner of Sin shall be forgiven*: and to suppose other Exceptions again from this Excep-

• y *Erasmus* in his *Paraphrase* interprets it, *vix inveniet veniam*. And *Latimer* in *Stype's Memorials*, vol. ii. p. 70. saith, This Sin is called unforgivable, because seldom forgiven: but on Repentance it may.

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tion, seems very unnatural. It would indeed be presumptuous to restrain the Mercies of God: but it is equally and perhaps more dangerous to extend them farther, than he permits us.

The Addition, that this Sin *shall neither be forgiven in this World, nor the World to come*, is taken by many for no more, than a stronger and fuller Way of saying, that it *shall not, or shall never, be forgiven*: which are the Expressions used in St. Mark and St. Luke. Some understand by it, neither in the Age or Dispensation of the Law, which was then present, when our Saviour spake; nor of the Gospel, which was ready to take Place of it: for so the Phrases, *this World*, and *the World to come*, are used in some Passages of the New Testament. But others, with good Appearance of Truth, carry the Meaning further, and apprehend it to be; that, whereas Corrections, and severe ones, are inflicted on many Sins in this Life, which yet, through the Grace and Mercy of God, are not imputed to Mens Condemnation, at the last Day; for this Sin, on the contrary, both heavy Punishment should fall on the guilty here, and heavier yet hereafter. And accordingly, in Fact, these blasphemous

Jesus underwent, in a few Years, the most dreadful Judgements: nor have we Cause to think of their eternal State otherwise, than with great Horror. Such then being the Sense of our Saviour's Words, let us enquire,

III. Why he passed a Sentence, thus peculiarly severe, against this one only Sin.

Now, had the Offence been speaking irreverently concerning the Person of the Holy Ghost: it would not have been easy to assign any Reason, why that should be less pardonable, than the same Irreverence towards the Father, or the Son. But since, as you have seen, it was vilifying his miraculous Operations and Gifts: there appear in it the most evident Marks of such Guilt and Danger, as could belong to no other. It was the greatest and wilfullest Obstinacy in the wrong, that can be imagined; when they, and all around them, saw the most illustrious and beneficial Miracles; done in Confirmation of the most holy and benevolent Doctrine, to stand out in Opposition to both: to insist, that the Devil conspired against himself, rather than own the Finger of God, where it was so exceedingly visible: and not only to blaspheme the Son of Man thus, during his State of Humiliation, at  
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which indeed their Prejudices might naturally take some considerable Offence; but after he was *exalted by the right Hand of God*<sup>a</sup>, and had *baptized his Apostles with the Holy Ghost; and with Fire*, as *John* had foretold<sup>b</sup> he should<sup>c</sup>; and enabled them by that Means, both to do *greater Works than himself*<sup>d</sup>, and besides to *understand all Mysteries*<sup>e</sup>, to *discern and make manifest the Secrets of Hearts*<sup>f</sup>, to *speak with unknown Tongues*<sup>g</sup>, to *shew beforehand Things to come*<sup>h</sup>, to confer the same Gifts on whom they would; and when every Assembly of Christians afforded almost daily Proofs of these Things; to persist yet, *neither entering into the Kingdom of Heaven themselves, nor suffering others to enter in*<sup>i</sup>; and not only to oppose, but to revile, the strongest Evidence, laid before them in the fullest Manner; and that, very probably, against the secret Conviction of their own Hearts too: such Behaviour manifests the most hardened and desperate Wickedness. All Men must suppose it, and our Saviour knew it, to proceed from an incurable Disease within; prevailing over the powerfullest and last Remedy, which divine

<sup>a</sup> Acts ii. 33.<sup>b</sup> *Match.* iii. 11.<sup>c</sup> *John* xiv. 12.<sup>d</sup> *Cor.* xiii. 2.<sup>e</sup> *Cor.* xii. 10, xiv. 25.<sup>f</sup> *Cor.* xiv. 2, &c.<sup>g</sup> *John* xvi. 13.<sup>h</sup> *Match.* xxiii. 13.

Wisdom thought fit to use : and therefore his Declaration, however awful, was but the natural Consequence of the State they were in. Had they only doubted, had they only denied, there might have been some Hope of them : but when Men are come to railing and blaspheming, as they were, they have done with attending and considering. Yet still, had they only rejected the Testimony of others concerning the wonderful Operations and Gifts of the Spirit ; stronger Testimony of others, or that of their own Senses, might have been added : but when this last had been vouchsafed them, there could possibly be no higher. It might indeed appear to them, on maturer Reflection, more convincing, than at first : but after sufficient Leisure to reflect had been also allowed them, as I have shewn you it was ; every Thing, that could be done for them, consistently with leaving them Freedom of Will, had been done, and all in vain.

This, you see, is plainly a very different Case from that of any other Sin. And the peculiar Guilt and Danger of it consists, not in its being committed against the Holy Spirit ; but in its being a wilful and obstinate Rejection, from wicked Motives, of the only Means remaining for Reformation and Forgiveness. Suppose the  
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Providence of God had so ordered it, that all Diseases should be curable, by some one particular Course of Medicine; still whoever despised and ridiculed that Course, instead of taking it, must perish.' And in like Manner, though all Sins would else be pardonable through the Grace of the Gospel: whoever scorns the utmost Efforts of that Grace, must fail of it. And our Saviour foreseeing, that these Persons would, pronounces their Doom. Every Advantage, that any others ever were to enjoy, they had enjoyed to the full, without Effect: and it was not suitable to the Honour of God's Government, or the Holiness of his Nature, to strive with such by still more extraordinary Methods; and do for the worst of Men, what he had not done for the rest. Their Condition, therefore, was not, that they should be denied Pardon, though they did repent: but it was foreknown, that they would not repent. So that whoever doth, may be sure, for that very Reason, that he hath not been guilty of the unpardonable *Blessphemy against the Holy Ghost*. Indeed no one now, when, through Length of Time, the Circumstances of the Case are so much altered, can lie under the same Guilt with those, to whom our Saviour spoke: nor can he therefore be  
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under the same Condemnation : for *the Judgment of God is always according to Truth*<sup>n</sup>. But though we cannot equal the Wickedness of the *Jews* in this Respect, yet we may come dreadfully near it. And therefore I proceed now to shew you,

IV. What Sins do, or do not, approach towards that, which is mentioned in the Text.

And here I shall speak separately, first of the Case of Unbelievers in Christ, then of Believers in him.

Unbelievers, ignorant of the Gospel, or of its proper Evidence, and who could not help their Ignorance, are not blamable for their Unbelief: nor surely inexcusable, though they should add reproachful Words to it, *speaking evil of Things which they know not*<sup>1</sup>. And though it be a great Unhappiness to them, that they have neither the same Means of Reformation and spiritual Improvement, nor the same Assurance of Pardon and Acceptance, that Christians have : yet it is their Unhappiness only, not their Fault. But such Unbelievers, as through a contemptuous Negligence refuse to consider the Doctrine of Christ, or from a vain Opinion of the Sufficiency of their own Reason, or from Love to

<sup>n</sup> Rom. ii. 2.

<sup>1</sup> Jude 10.

any Sin, reject it; these put themselves in the high Road towards the Sin, condemned here by our Saviour. And if they add to their Infidelity profane and irreverent Language; they advance nearer to it. But if Part of that Language be ascribing the Miracles and spiritual Gifts, mentioned in the New Testament, to an evil Power, of which some amongst them have given Intimations; and above all, if they do this from a malicious Heart, and perhaps against their own inward Persuasion too; then they come as near to it, as they are able. And yet one cannot but hope, that, since the Evidence of the Gospel is not either quite so full and strong, or so obvious and easily seen at once, as it was in the Days of our Saviour and his Apostles; they may, after all, think better of it, repent and obtain Pardon.

If indeed they have, since they came to a full Use of Reason, deliberately professed Christianity, and then forsaken it, and become Railers and Scoffers at it; this Case is worse, than if they had never believed; in Proportion as they have seen the Evidences, understood the Nature, and felt the Influences of the Gospel; and yet, after all, have broken the Faith, which they had solemnly engaged to it. The



Epistle to the *Hebrews* therefore declares it is impossible for those, who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly Gift, and were made Partakers of the Holy Ghost, and have tasted the good Word of God, and the Powers of the World to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto Repentance: seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open Shame\*. But then, explicit and terrible as these Words are, yet some of them plainly relate to those miraculous Gifts and Powers, which we do not now experience, and therefore cannot sin against them to that Degree, nor by Consequence make our Condition so desperate, as those who did; besides that *impossible*, both in Scripture and common Language, often means no more, than extremely difficult and hopeless; but not beyond the Reach of his Grace, *with whom all Things are possible*†. And as this Impossibility is expressly here said to be that of *renewing them to Repentance*: (which powerfully strengthens what I have already proved to you, that the *Blasphemy against the Holy Ghost* is unpardonable, only because it leaves no Foundation to

\* Heb. vi. 4—6.

† Math. xix. 26.

repent upon) so when any one is *reverted to Repentance*, this Passage contains not the least Intimation, that he cannot be forgiven.

But supposing a total and settled Unbelief and Apostacy to be ever so irretrievable; yet merely having doubted, nay having inclined to the wrong Side, or even been a good deal persuaded of it, and that for some Time, is very far from being the same Case. The Apostles themselves at first did not believe the Resurrection of our Saviour: St. Thomas stood out a whole Week: two of them in St. Luke speak of their Persuasion, that this was *he who should have redeemed Israel*, as past and at an End<sup>a</sup>. Yet, as all this arose from Infirmary, not Wickedness, they met with an easy Pardon; and so will others like them. But few of those, whom Sensuality, and fewer still, whom vain Self-opinion leads to Scepticism, ever recover themselves. And as this affords no small Confirmation to the awful Doctrine of the Text: so it should warn all from taking so much as the first Steps in that fatal Path, from which Men so seldom return: but especially against setting out with treating Religion and Morals in a scornful and ludicrous Manner; which is directly opposite to modest

<sup>a</sup> Luke xxi. 27.

and humble Inquiry ; manifests a very criminal Partiality, as well as Sufficiency ; and naturally terminates in a complete Disregard to every Thing wise and good.

Thus much concerning Infidels and Apostates. Christians, while they continue such, are in very little Danger of committing the Sin, condemned in the Text. Some indeed have imagined, that every deliberate Transgression amounted to it, and was unpardonable ; because the Epistle to the *Hebrews* saith, that *if we sin wilfully, after that we have received the Knowledge of the Truth, there remaineth no more Sacrifice for Sins, but a certain fearful looking for of Judgment*. But then it appears very plainly, that not any wilful Sin whatever is meant there, but that one only, which is mentioned immediately before and after ; laying aside *the Profession of the Faith, treading under Foot the Son of God, counting the Blood of the Covenant an unholy Thing, doing Despite unto the Spirit of Grace* : that is, renouncing and reviling Christianity. And it by no Means follows, that because they, who have rejected *Christ*, will no where find any other Atonement for their Sins, therefore they who believe in him, but have criminally

<sup>a</sup> Heb. x. 26, 27.

violated some of his Precepts, cannot partake of his Atonement, ~~though~~ they apply for it with penitent Hearts. It is very true, St. *John* hath told us, *there is a Sin unto Death*, at least was in those Days, of which if any one was guilty, he could give no Encouragement to *pray for him*°. But the whole Scripture tells us, that not every wilful Sin is certainly unto Death: and our Saviour in the Text hath told us, that only the *Blasphemy*, the malicious Evil-speaking, *against the Holy Ghost* is such. Now they who believe in the Father and the Son cannot surely think ill either of the Person or the Operations of the Spirit; and therefore cannot be ordinarily tempted to speak ill of them, with any real Meaning of what they say: and unmeaning profane Expressions, though undoubtedly very full of Guilt, and likely to produce more and greater Guilt, are yet far from that most abandoned Wickedness, to which the Passage before us relates.

Sometimes indeed Christians, and very good ones, may accuse themselves of having entertained irreverent Thoughts, and, it may be, spoken irreverent Words of Religion, of the Scriptures, of the Holy Spirit himself: but this

• 1 John v. 16.

hath been, when they were under so peculiar a Disturbance of Mind, that they had not the Command of their Thoughts or Words : and then they may be absolutely sure, that the all-knowing, just, and good God will not consider these Offences, as, in a moral Sense, theirs. In some Disorders, it is no more possible for Men to hinder wicked Thoughts from taking Possession of their Minds, or blasphemous Words from coming out of their Mouths, than to hinder any other Distemper, (for plainly this is one) which may attack any other Part of them, from shewing itself by its common Effects. And it is no more a Crime, when they are in such a Condition, to utter Things even against God ; \* than it is for a Child, in Convulsions or light-headed, to strike its Parent. And though they may not think themselves disordered, and in other Respects may not be so ; yet in this Want of Self-government, proportionably to the Degree of it, they certainly are. And it makes no Difference at all with Regard to their Innocence, whether the Disorder be a natural bodily one, affecting the Mind ; which is notoriously the common Case, though attended sometimes with very unaccountable Symptoms ; or whether it arise from the Suggestions of the wicked one. For

as he tempted Christ himself, so he hath ever since molested Christians; and often suggested the worst of Things to the best of Men. Our Words indeed, notwithstanding such Temptations, we may for the most Part restrain: but we can by no Means always prevent Impressions being made on our Imaginations: and how strongly soever any one may experience them to be made on his, still the wicked Thoughts, which he laments all the while, is terrified at, and almost in Agonies about, certainly do not proceed from his own Will and Choice; and for that Reason, far from being unpardonable Sins, they are in Truth no Sins at all; but grievous Afflictions, for which God will hereafter reward him, if he endeavours to suffer them patiently. This you would immediately perceive, and say, in the Case of any other Person: and therefore, when Occasion requires, you should say it to yourself. But if you cannot, or if it proves to no great Purpose, nay to so little that you are driven to the very Borders of Despair, yet Despair itself, so far as it is a mere Disease, is not an Offence against God.

But then, how remote soever we are from committing the Sin, which cannot be pardoned; we may too easily commit such, as

will not be pardoned: for none will, without true Repentance. And every Transgression either invites or drives us into repeated and worse Transgressions, which insensibly so *harden us through their Deceitfulness*<sup>p</sup>, that though, while the *Day of Salvation*<sup>q</sup> continues, we always may repent, it becomes less and less likely, that we ever shall. And even if we do, we shall, notwithstanding, even in this World, usually be great Sufferers one Way or another: and, unless we become uncommonly zealous in our Duty, shall attain a much lower Degree of Happiness in the next. Bear in your Minds therefore the Son of *Sirach's* Words: *Flee from Sin, as from the Face of a Serpent: for if thou comest too near it, it will bite thee: the Teeth thereof are as the Teeth of a Lion, slaying the Souls of Men. All Iniquity is as a two-edged Sword, the Wounds whereof cannot be healed*<sup>r</sup>: cannot be healed at all, without Danger and Difficulty and Pain; nor so perfectly at best, but that still either Weakness, or Scars and Deformities however, will be left behind. Let us therefore carefully avoid all Sin: but particularly avoid all Sins relating

<sup>p</sup> 1 K. b. iii. 13.      <sup>q</sup> 2 Cor. vi. 2.      <sup>r</sup> Eccus. xxi. 2, 3.

the Holy Ghost, and practise all Duties relating to him : that so, abiding in his Fellowship, being supported by his Testimony, and rejoicing in his Comfort, we may at length be *sealed with the Spirit of Promise, the Earnest of that Inheritance*, to which, &c.

\* Eph. i. 13, 14.





## S E R M O N X.

MATTH. xii. 36.

*But I say unto you, that every idle Word, that Men shall speak, they shall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgment.*

OUR blessed Saviour, whenever his Hearers were Persons of well-disposed Minds, and free from Prejudices, taught them the Duties of Religion in the plainest Terms. But Length of Time, and Difference of Language, have made some of his Expressions, even on such Occasions, hard to be understood, or liable to be misunderstood: and hence, unless we are both upright and considerate, may arise Mistakes of great Importance. For if we interpret these Passages with too much Indulgence to ourselves, as human Nature is very prone to do, we corrupt the Purity of his Precepts, and endanger  
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our own Salvation : first aiming at less than we ought, then of Course falling short of that. And yet the opposite Extreme, of straining them too high, hath seldom done Good, and often Harm : hath deterred weak Spirits from taking the Burthen of Religion upon them, entangled scrupulous Tempers with endless Perplexities, and made rigid ones uncharitable and superstitious : given the Enemies of Christianity Opportunities of declaiming against it, as unnaturally severe ; and tempted the careless Professors of it, after rejecting, as they well might, the over-strict Sense of such Phrases, not to take the Pains of looking for any other ; but go on, unrestrained by them, to live as they please.

Thus it hath happened in Relation to the Text of Scripture, which I have just read to you. Some few, understanding by *every idle Word*, every needless or trifling one ; and by *giving Account*, being condemned ; have either forced themselves to an absurd Reservedness and Silence in Company, or been very uneasy, that they were unable to do it ; while the profane have ridiculed both them and the Gospel, on that Account. But the Generality of Mankind, soon perceiving, that this could not be  
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the Meaning of the Words, have never concerned themselves to inquire what was; but have freely taken all the same Liberties in Discourse, as if no such Warning had ever been given by our blessed Lord.

Now that he was far from the Intention of laying down unfociable Rules for Behaviour, his whole Character sufficiently shews; which was in no Respect harsh and austere, but humane and converfible. The whole Temper of his Religion proves it yet more fully: it is an *easy Yoke*<sup>a</sup>; it enjoins *whatsoever Things are lovely and of good Report*<sup>b</sup>; it enjoins particularly, *being courteous*<sup>c</sup>; of which being affable is a material Part: and this can never consist with disapproving, as unlawful, every Word that might have been spared. Discourse on Subjects of little or no Importance is as necessary, at Times, for the Relaxation of our Minds, as Exercise without Business for the Refreshment of our Bodies. It is a proper Exertion of that Chearfulness, which God hath plainly designed us to shew, on small Occasions, as well as great. Besides, it wins and engages those, whom speechless or sententious Gravity might not only displease, but prepossess against every Thing good; whereas

<sup>a</sup> Matth. xi. 30.

<sup>b</sup> Phil. iv. 8.

<sup>c</sup> 1 Pet. iii. 8.  
observing.

observing, even in slight Matters, the Apostle's Rule, of *graceful Speech*, (for so the best Interpreters understand what is translated *Speech with Grace*) *seasoned with Salt*, *that we may know how we ought to answer every Man*<sup>a</sup>, both expresses and increases mutual Good-will; and enables us, from being innocently entertaining, to become seriously useful. We may be sure therefore, that whatever Discourse hath this general good Tendency, and no bad one, be there otherwise ever so little Use or Significancy in it, cannot be in any blameable Sense, *idle Words*.

And indeed, if we look into what precedes the Text, we shall find it was not occasioned by Persons saying more than they needed, but other Things than they ought. And therefore learned Men have supposed this Phrase, of *idle Words*, to be one of those many, in all Writers, which imply more than they express. In Scripture, *unfruitful Works of Darknets*<sup>b</sup> means pernicious Works: what is *unprofitable for you*<sup>c</sup>, means, what would be hurtful to you. In common Speech, a worthless Man, is one, who, besides having no Good, hath much Harm in him. And thus they understand an *idle Word* to be not merely an useless, but a false

<sup>a</sup> Col. iv. 6.<sup>b</sup> Eph. v. 11.<sup>c</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.

Assertion,

Affertion, which is almost always, at the same Time, in one Way or other, an injurious one: such as evidently those were, of which our Saviour is here speaking. An Interpretation, that undoubtedly removes all Appearance of Harshness from this Part of his Doctrine, and is not without Support from the Use of the Term in old Writers. Yet still, the solemn Form of Introduction, *But I say unto you*, seldom, if ever, used by him, when he taught only common and known Truths, inclines one strongly to look for somewhat farther, than a bare Declaration, that injurious and calumniating Language is sinful. And, in Fact, the Expression, *idle Words*, in the *Jewish* Language, sometimes denotes all such, as make up the careless easy Conversation of our Leisure-Time: agreeably to which, the Writers in it mention them, often with Contempt, or lower Marks of Dislike, as there is too often Cause: but now and then also with a Degree of Praise: as when a noted Commentator of theirs, who lived above 500 Years ago<sup>t</sup>, explains that Passage in the first Psalm, *His Leaf also shall not wither*, from Rabbins yet older than himself, thus: that

‡ R. David Kimchi.



*even the idle Talk*, so he expresses it, *of a good Man ought to be regarded*: the most superfluous Things he saith, are always of some Value. • And other ancient Authors have the same Phrase nearly in the same Sense.

Our Saviour therefore probably intended here to say, that *we shall give an Account, in the Day of Judgment*, of our most unguarded and unmeaning Discourse. Not that we shall be charged with the Whole of it, as criminal. God forbid! We may as well be charged with every needless inarticulate Sound, or bodily Gesture<sup>h</sup>. The Apostle speaks of Persons *giving their Account with Joy*<sup>i</sup>. And so may we give ours, even concerning this Part of our Conversation, if we take Care to be such as we ought. For *make the Tree good*: and both *the Fruit*<sup>k</sup> and the Leaves will be so too. The full Sense of the Text then is, that not only our studied and deliberate, but our slighter and more negligent Words, as well as Actions, will, in Proportion to their Weight, have an Influence on the future Determination of our everlasting State. It appears, from what goes

<sup>h</sup> And indeed the Stoic Doctrine was: *Digitum exere, peccas.*  
 P. v. v. 119.

<sup>i</sup> Heb. xiii. 17.

<sup>k</sup> Matth. xii. 33.

before, that some of the *Jews* had been maliciously ascribing the Miracles of Christ to infernal Powers. Others, without Question, as it always happens, had thoughtlessly taken up and spread the Notion, which they had heard. He therefore, after confuting the former, lets the latter also know their Share of the Guilt, by adding, that, on every Occasion, *out of the Abundance of the Heart, the Mouth speaketh. A good Man, out of the good Treasure of the Heart, bringeth forth good Things: and an evil Man, out of the evil Treasure, bringeth forth evil Things.* Then he goes on: *But I say unto you, that every idle Word, that Men shall speak, they shall give Account thereof in the Day of Judgement. For by thy Words thou shalt be justified, and by thy Words thou shalt be condemned*<sup>1</sup>.

Designed Expressions, in Discourse, of Impiety towards God, Injustice to Man, Disregard to Virtue or Decency, can proceed only from an abandoned Heart. But the Conversation of most Persons is full of unobserved Faults and bad Tendencies: which, like a Multitude of small Expences, make us Debtors beyond what we could imagine: and by

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xii. 34—37.



continual, though slighter Impressions on our Morals and Piety, gradually undermine what the most violent open Assault could not have overturned. Each particular Offence appears a Trifle: some, taken alone, almost imperceptible: they disguise themselves under the Shew of that chearful Freedom, without which human Life would be quite uncomfortable: and thus a Number of Enemies, entering single, form a Body at Length, that masters the Place. Now though it may seem no great Oversight to admit one or two of these; yet not to be alarmed as they increase upon us, is unpardonable Want of Care. Therefore, to acquaint ourselves better with the Danger, and the Means of guarding against it, let us consider, how common it is to speak in a very unfit Manner, chiefly through Inconsiderateness, of Religion, moral Virtue, and one another.

I. Of Religion. Both Prudence and good Breeding, not to say, a little Distrust of their own Abilities and Impartiality, might induce even those, who have examined its Authority and doubt of its Truth, if any such there be, still to be shy of declaring against what many others, and possibly some of equal Abilities,  
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after as full an Examination, hold sacred. And yet such as have never examined in the least, nor once put a Question to themselves about it, can, with a most contemptuous Negligence, take for granted the Falseness of the most awful Truths, and talk upon that Supposition, in so assured and easy a Manner, as if Nobody differed from them. Whenever they do chance to hear of an Argument, that seems to make for them, they applaud it, even without understanding it. But a Jest they look on, as superior to all Argument: and if any Text of Scripture can have an unfair ludicrous Turn given it, or any Article of Faith be misrepresented into an Absurdity, this they triumph in, without Mercy. Now whatever Excuse there may be for the Doubts, or the Mistakes, of inquisitive and humble Minds: yet when the ignorant or thoughtless take upon them to despise the Laws of Heaven, without Pretence for it; and make the noblest Hopes of human Nature, the Theme of their Scorn and Ridicule: this is a most heinous Kind of idle Discourse.

But there is another Sort, though not so shocking, yet more extensively mischievous: when they, who profess Religion, and think

they are serious in the Profession, as surely, if it be a Truth, it is the most serious one that can be, allow themselves inadvertently in saying what tends to its Ruin : when they speak with Disregard of the appointed Methods of supporting it in the World : when they join in loose Harangues against Enthusiasm and Superstition, without putting in due Cautions to distinguish them from the most rational Feelings of Love, and Marks of Respect, to our Maker, Redeemer, and Sanctifier, which Christianity hath enjoined : when they, who by no Means intend to be profane, repeat the profane Things that others have said or done, with Indulgence and Pleasure : when they carry on Discourse, that reflects upon Doctrines, which they themselves inwardly believe ; and treat Duties with Indifference, or even Contempt, which at the same Time they acknowledge, and, it may be, practise, as Duties. This unmeaning Compliance with fashionable Talk, which they might easily avoid, yet not be remarkable ; or if they were, it would be to their Honour ; brings them by Degrees to think slightly of what they have been affecting to speak slightly of : till their Piety wastes away into an empty Form : and

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it is seldom long, before they grow ashamed of even that. Thus is their *Mouth their Destruction, and their Lips the Snare of their Souls<sup>m</sup>*. At least they lead others into a wrong Way, who are afterwards tempted to go farther; they permit themselves to be suspected; they desert the Defence of Religion, when it wants all possible Help; and are false to their own Cause. All good Men therefore should be very careful, that their outward Appearance do not contradict their inward Faith. Doubtless there are Seasons, in which Pleasantry is proper: but there are Subjects, on which it is never proper; and Religion is one. Abruptly intruding grave Maxims into the Midst of Mirth, without any Thing to call for them, would be disgusting and absurd. But still, whatever Difference of Manner different Occasions may require, as they certainly require a very great one; we should always continue the same in our gayest Hours, that we are in our most serious; and preserve an Uniformity of Character throughout. Nor can there be any Character more consistent or amiable, than theirs, whom dutiful Regard to the greatest and best of Beings influences, not only to be just and good in their Behaviour, but some-

<sup>m</sup> Prov. xviii, 7.

times instructive; sometimes entertaining, always innocent, in their Conversation.

This Head of irreligious idle Words could not have been concluded, without severe Animadversions on the monstrous Custom of unmeaning Oaths and Imprecations, if the Sinfulness of it were not so notorious, and so often set before you, that I hope you can have no Doubt, but such Language will be a dreadful Article of Account in the Day of Judgement. Let us therefore proceed to consider,

II. What Sort of Usage moral Virtue frequently meets with, in our familiar Discourse; not from any premeditated Design against it; for that belongs to another Subject; but principally through Inadvertency. How favourably are most of us apt to speak even of gross Vices, when high Rank, or superficial Agreeableness, give them a false Lustre: and how commonly do we treat the basest and most cruel Behaviour, that Men are guilty of in Pursuit of their Pleasure, as Matter of Diversion only; as no Exceptions against their Characters, but rather perhaps a Kind of Recommendation! How imperfectly sometimes is the Decency of Conversation preserved amongst Persons of tolerably good Repute: in direct Contradiction to the Apostle's Precept, *Let*

*no corrupt Communication proceed out of your Mouth*<sup>a</sup>: and with what strange Indulgence are Offences of this Kind usually received! How thoughtlessly do many applaud and propagate vile Notions of human Nature, that tend only to make it yet viler; and gratify a preposterous Vanity, by representing their Species worse, than it is. Concerning themselves indeed, the Patrons of such Opinions may, in a good Measure, deserve Belief. Yet even they are not quite so bad, as they absurdly endeavour to have it imagined, all Mankind are! How many again will defend Immoralities, of which they would by no Means be guilty: and are profligate in their Discourse, while they are regular in their Lives! Nor doth it content us always, by our idle Talk to keep Wickedness in Countenance: but we lay Virtue under positive Discouragements. Modesty and Chastity, in one Sex at least, with too many is a Matter of great Raillery. Of Uprightness and Honesty, on some Occasions, we speak with but a contemptuous Kind of Approbation at best. Patience and Forgiveness of Injuries we treat as downright Mean-spiritedness; Discretion in Conduct, as a formal disagreeable Thing; Frugality as an

<sup>a</sup> Eph. iv. 29.

odious one, though requisite for the Purposes of Justice, or made subservient to those of Charity. But especially where disadvantageous Peculiarities throw any Thing of a Shade on the truest Merit; we are extremely apt to condemn and ridicule in the Gross, what, however clouded, we ought to distinguish, and mention with due Honour. A little Ungracefulness of Behaviour, or Meanness of Appearance, or Defect in Point of Abilities, or Ignorance of the World, though accompanied with a worthy Heart, shall provoke a harder Censure from us, than a mischievous Turn of Mind, or a vicious Course of Behaviour: nay we can fancy Circumstances, when we find none, to render good Qualities despicable. Then while we thus depreciate real Virtues, we exalt imaginary ones into their Places; false Honour, false Good-nature; which lead often to the worst of Crimes, and disguise them under the best of Names. In short, the Conversation, even of those who are counted virtuous, by others and themselves, goes a great deal too much, without their attending to it, on Maxims directly contrary to the Principles which they avow: and places both the Conduct and Enjoyment of Life upon a wrong Footing. For Instance: Are we not perpetually

tually speaking of this present World, as if it were our All: nay, of the outward Shew of Things here, as if it were the true and only Happiness of Man? What Impression must this make, by Degrees, on the Minds of those who hear us: indeed on our own? By thoughtlessly talking thus upon mistaken Suppositions, we shall come at Length to forget they are such; and act at least like those, who think them true. But let us now consider,

III. How wrongly we treat each other, in our careless easy Discourse; not from deliberate ill Will, but by Way of Amusement.

One raises an idle Story, to divert the Company, at the Expence of a Person, who, it may be, hath not given the least Ground for it. A second catches what he hears; perhaps believes it too hastily; perhaps doth not believe it, but tells it notwithstanding: a third fills it up with plausible Circumstances: the general Voice repeats it: and then, what every one says, passes for certain: especially if the Composition be seasoned with a small Spice of Wit, it is universally relished, and lasts for a long Time. But if besides, it lessens an honourable Character; instead of doubting, or being sorry, People echo it with immoderate Joy:  
and



and yet every one thinks himself clear of all Blame, because he means only Entertainment. Possibly he did: and yet, as neither he, nor they that heard him, would have been near so much entertained with a good Report, as an ill one; there is almost always at the Bottom of this Practice, a latent Malignity of Heart against our Fellow-Creatures; *our Brethren, for whom Christ died*°, and whom both Nature and Religion command us to love. But whatever the Principle be, the Effects are very bad. Unthinking Licentiousness of Speech, concerning Persons of high Rank, may endanger even a Nation's Peace. And yet what Numbers are there, that will venture to assert, without the least Diffidence, whatever suits their Humour, on Matters, which perhaps they know Nothing of: and when once they are got into the Road of Talk, quicken their Pace, without perceiving it; and will go any Length, to keep one another Company: so that, to use the Terms of Scripture, *the Beginning of the Words of their Mouth is Foolishness: and the End, mischievous Madness*†. But in private Life, no one can tell, what unhappy Consequences a false Report to the Disad-

° Rom. xiv. 15.

† Eccl. x. 13.

vantage of another, though seemingly in a Trifle, may have. Or if it were a true Report; let us ask ourselves, how could our Tempers, how indeed would our Characters bear, that every Thing, which is true of us, should be spread abroad? And were the Person, who had done it, to say in his own Defence, that he had no Design of hurting us; when however he had no Regard, whether he hurt us or not; would this appear a sufficient Plea? The Harm done is not the less, often the greater, for the negligent Manner it is done in. That procures Belief: whereas apparent Malice, or Passion, would render what we say suspected. Besides, Anger is frequently founded on Provocations, that a little excuse the Injuries it doth: but indolently treading under Foot the Reputations of others, is wanton Cruelty; that with the gayest Indifference delivers Persons over to Reproach or Contempt, it may be for Life, rather than an ill-natured Story, or a lucky Turn of Words, shall be lost; that puts the good Name of another, on which his All may depend, into the Balance, and lets the Love of Talk, the Vanity of having early Intelligence, or any other silly Fancy, outweigh it. Every one should strive indeed

to

to make such Conversation harmless, by expressing a Disregard and Dislike to it. But, as this will never be done effectually; so, if it were, the Guilt of these charitable Communicators would be much the same; for they certainly did not design to be thus insignificant.

There is yet another, and frequently a more fatal Way still, of injuring others by unmeaning Discourse: when, merely to enliven the present Hour, we give them, with false Civility, a higher Opinion of their own Accomplishments, or our Esteem of them, or good Intentions towards them, than we ought. Many ridiculous Mistakes, and many serious Inconveniencies, are Men thus drawn into: they lose the little Knowledge they had of themselves; affect what misbecomes them, attempt what they are unequal to; and take wrong Steps in Life, that always expose, and often ruin them: to the great Diversion, sometimes, of those, who should be otherwise moved at seeing the Mischief to which they have contributed.

These Instances, without seeking for more, abundantly shew the Need of watching over our freest and easiest Conversation, and the Justice of its undergoing God's final Censure.

*Lo,*

*Lo, there is not a Word in my Tongue, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether*<sup>a</sup>. And whatever he observes whether good or bad in us, the righteous Judge of the whole Earth will accordingly reward or punish. Perhaps we may not particularly foresee the Harm we do by our irreligious, immoral, or injurious idle Words: but we cannot help foreseeing, that not a little may arise from them: and it must be, in general, a wrong Turn of Mind, that prompts us to them. For as *the Fruit declareth if the Tree have been dressed; so is the Utterance of a Conceit in the Heart of Man*<sup>a</sup>. It is very true, that the Government of the Tongue at all Times is a Matter of great Difficulty: and *if any one offend not in Word, the same is a perfect Man*<sup>a</sup>, indeed. But still we might offend much less than we do, and approach much nearer to this Perfection, would we but often recollect, *that for these Things also God will bring us into Judgment*<sup>a</sup>: a Consideration, that should make us, like the Psalmist, *keep our Mouth, as it were with a Bridle*<sup>b</sup>.

Possibly it may be objected, that such Attention as this would embarrass Conversation.

<sup>a</sup> Ps. cxxxix. 3.  
<sup>b</sup> Eccl. xi. 9.

<sup>c</sup> Eccles. xxvii. 6.  
<sup>d</sup> Ps. xaxix. 2.

<sup>e</sup> James iii. 2.

with endless Restraints, which will make it quite disagreeable : and the Awe of Religion in our chearful Moments, damp the whole Pleasure of Society. Nor can it be denied, that observing Rules in their Discourse, would, to some Persons, for some Time, be a grievous Task. But so it is in every Thing that we undertake to learn, especially if we have learnt wrong before : and yet we shall never learn to good Purpose, without observing Rules : and the closer Pains we take at first, the more graceful and easier Figure we shall make afterwards, in Performances of any Kind. Men of Understanding and Application may soon qualify themselves to be very entertaining on harmless and useful Subjects : and consequently running into others must imply, either low Abilities, or bad Dispositions, or criminal Thoughtlessness. But if Conversation doth lose, by due Regulations, a little of its Poignancy ; it loses its Venom too : and surely the Delight of hearing, or saying, improper lively Things, may well be given up, to avoid the exquisite Uneasiness they sometimes cause, and the various ill Effects they generally have. As for the Awe of Religion : were it in our Choice, whether there should be an Inspector of our Actions and Words and Thoughts,

Thoughts, or not; it might deserve Consideration, what Influence on the Comfort of our Beings that Inspection would have. But since we know there is one, under whose Eye we live continually; our only Concern is to suit our Behaviour to this our Condition, be it more pleasing, or be it less. Not that in Reality there could be a happier, than Subjection to his fatherly Care, who considers our Frame, and *knoweth whereof we are made*<sup>w</sup>: who hath given us every Principle of Joy and Delight, that belongs to our Nature; and approves of the innocent Use of them all. But then the most indulgent Superior, that will preserve himself a Superior, as God assuredly will, must require so much Regard to his Presence, as shall restrain us, not only from wilful and flagrant Offences, but from that supine Negligence, which, though it be shewn in lesser Instances only, yet, by the incessant Repetition of them, argues great Disregard: such, that, were we to consider ourselves only as God's Creatures, we should be obliged to avoid conscientiously. But if we consider ourselves as fallen, sinful, redeemed Creatures, redeemed by the Love of him, whom *if we love we must keep his Commandments*<sup>v</sup>, and

<sup>w</sup> Ps. ciii. 14.<sup>v</sup> John xiv. 15.

whose Wrath we shall not *escape, if we neglect so great Salvation*<sup>1</sup>, here will be additional Motives of the strongest Sort, not only to *set a Watch before our Mouths, and keep the Door of our Lips*<sup>2</sup>, but to *purify our Hearts*<sup>3</sup>, through Faith in him: and when we have thus, for there is no other Way, *healed the Fountain, then it will send forth sweet Water*<sup>4</sup>: then, if the Sense of our Obligations, and our Danger, in this Respect, should, as it will, by representing Conversation in a different Light, from what we had seen it in before, moderate our Fondness for it; lessen the Time we spend in it, and the Share we take to ourselves of it; make us cautious of saying more than hath at least a general good Tendency, and careful to a greater Degree, in Proportion as we are obliged to live more in Company, and as our Discourse will be more regarded there: we shall plainly perceive, that no Manner of Harm follows, but more Good than a little, by the Leisure we thus gain for serious Thought, valuable Books, and requisite Employments of several Kinds. A more thorough Acquaintance, in Retirement, with our-

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ps. cxli. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Acts xv. 9.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings ii. 21. James iii. 11.

selves and our Duty, our own Affairs and useful Knowledge, will send us back into Company, from Time to Time, greatly improved, both in proper Subjects of Discourse, and proper Cautions for speaking of them in such a Manner, as to be at once agreeable, innocent, and instructive. Thus prepared by the cool Reflections of Solitude, we might enjoy the full Pleasure of Society, without any Remorse ensuing: and turn that Part of our Lives, in which too commonly our best Inclinations wither away, and many bad ones take deep Root, into a continual Exercise of benefiting our Fellow-Creatures, and advancing ourselves in the Favour of our Maker. For, to any one thus disposed, numberless Opportunities would occur, at such Times, of *Communication, which is good to the Use of edifying and ministering Grace unto the Hearers*: Opportunities of making Religion and Morals look chearful and amiable; of insinuating reasonable Advice; of softening rugged Tempers; of confirming right Resolutions, and putting wrong Behaviour out of Countenance. And in Proportion as the natural or acquired Abilities of Men are greater, or their Rank fe-

<sup>c</sup> Eph. iv. 29.



cures to them more Regard, the more extensively serviceable they may be in this Way. But where all these Advantages meet together in an eminent Degree, it is inexpressible, what Blessings to Mankind they, who enjoy them, might be, would they but use them well. For then, not only the busier Part of their Time would be spent in promoting Piety and Virtue, Prudence and Happiness; but their most disengaged and freest Hours become Seasons of delightful Improvement to all about them: in which, imitating the kindly Influences of Heaven, *their Doctrine would drop as the Rain, their Speech distil as the Dew: as the small Rain upon the tender Herb, and as the Showers upon the Grass*<sup>d</sup>

<sup>d</sup> Deut. xxxii. 3.

## S E R M O N XI..

MATTH. xiii. 16.

*But blessed are your Eyes, for they see; and your Ears, for they hear.*

OUR Saviour, in the Parable of the Sower, which occasioned these Words, compares the Reception of his Doctrine in the Hearts of Men to that of Seed in different Sorts of Ground. Some are like the Highway, beaten and hard, an open Thoroughfare to all Comers and Goers: there it lies loose on the Surface, and is immediately crushed under Foot, or *devoured by the Fowls of the Air*: the very first Suggestion of the Devil, the World, or the Flesh, destroys at once the Effect of all the Instruction in their Duty that is given them. Others resemble a light, but shallow Soil, with a Rock underneath: where the Seed quickly springs up, but is quickly also scorched and withered. They

are glad to believe, and forward to profess, what promises the Favour of God and future Happiness; but impenetrable to all Attempts of a thorough Change within: bad Inclination resists firmly at the Bottom, while external Performances make a specious Appearance to the Eye. Whenever the Time comes, that they are to suffer or lose any Thing for doing their Duty, this is much too difficult a Service for them; they have no Root sufficient to furnish them with Strength to bear it; they are burnt up, and shrivel away to Nothing. In a third Sort, the Seed of the Word takes deeper Hold, and makes very strong and promising Shoots: but Thorns and bad Weeds, the earlier Possessors of the Field, rise up and choak it. For these grow of themselves: but it requires Culture, and Watchfulness to root them out: instead of which, too many plant them in the Midst of the Corn, intangle themselves, without Need, in the Cares and Riches and Pleasures of this Life, which they heedlessly indulge, till every better Principle is weakened, overshadowed and smothered. But still there remains a fourth Sort, *who, in an honest and good Heart, having heard the Word, keep it, and bring forth Fruit*<sup>a</sup>; yet very un-

<sup>a</sup> Luke viii. 15.

equally,

equally, *some an hundred Fold, some sixty, some thirty.*

The Persons, to whom this Doctrine was delivered, gave immediate Proof of its Truth. The Generality, fond of the Shew of Religion, but dreading to undertake the Practice of it in earnest, *hearing heard not, and seeing saw not<sup>b</sup>*, to any useful Purpose, what in this Form of Speech of our Saviour laid before them: as indeed he declares he knew would be their Case, and therefore designedly used a Manner of Expression, which they would not take the Trouble, small as it was, to understand<sup>c</sup>. For such neither deserved plainer Instructions, nor would have made any other than a bad Use of them; which could only have increased their Guilt. Nay, his Disciples themselves apprehended his Meaning, though obvious enough, but imperfectly; and desired to have it explained to them<sup>d</sup>. This however shewed a good Disposition: and therefore he not only condescends to their Request, but assures them it was a Happiness unspeakable to have any Degree of proper Attention to, and serious Sense of, a Thing so infinitely important, as God's Word. *Blessed are your Eyes, for they see; and your Ears, for they hear.* A Truth,

<sup>a</sup> b Matth. xiii. 14.

<sup>c</sup> Ib.

<sup>d</sup> Luke viii. 9.

which, though applicable more eminently, beyond Comparison, to those who heard and saw the Word of Life himself, yet must hold in Proportion of all, who are taught, by the Ministry of his Servants, the Christian Doctrine. This Passage then asserts in a strong Manner the Benefit of religious Instruction : which many appear, unhappily for themselves and others, to undervalue exceedingly.

Indeed we are all very apt to overlook and slight the Advantages, that we have long enjoyed without Interruption, even in our worldly Affairs. Health and Plenty, Safety and Liberty, excite in us very little Thankfulness : but the Things of another, and, we imagine, distant Life, make a still fainter Impression. Hence great Numbers thoughtlessly disregard Religion : and some avowedly disbelieve it. No Wonder, if many of these think teaching it needless, or even hurtful. But others also, who profess to acknowledge the Duties, that we owe to our Creator, of a sober, and righteous, and godly Life ; yet maintain, that in Goodness, nay Justice, he is bound to make them, and in Fact hath made them all, so evident by Nature to every Man, that we want no farther Information to know the Whole of them. But how do they prove  
5 this ?

this? The Goodness of God is extended to his various Creatures in Degrees extremely different; and none is entitled to claim this Degree or that. The Justice of God permits him to give as low Capacities to Men as he pleases; and binds him only to require, in Proportion to what he gives. Why then may he not put us under a Necessity of learning from each other, in a great Measure, the Way to future Happiness, as well as the Methods of procuring to ourselves the Conveniences and Necessaries of common Life? Should we not be wretchedly furnished with these, indeed should we be able to subsist, were each Generation, each Man, to provide them for his own Use, without being previously taught<sup>e</sup>? And must we not have been much more at a Loss in Matters of a moral and spiritual Nature? We are endued with Reason: but we should apply it very little, if at all, to Subjects of this Kind; and make a very slow Progress in them, if we did; unless Education, that is, Instruction, opened the Way, and directed our Steps. We have an inbred Sense of Good and Evil, which enable:

<sup>e</sup> Neque tam est acris acies in naturis hominum & ingeniis, ut res tantas quisquam, nisi monstratas, possit videre; neque tanta tamen in rebus obscuritas, ut eas non penitus acri vir ingenio cernat, si modo aspexerit. Cic. de Or. l. 3. § 31.

us, in many Things, *of ourselves to judge what is right*<sup>f</sup>. But then, however it comes to pass, which our boasted Faculties will scarce be able to tell us, this moral Perception is by no Means perfect or distinct; and it is mixed with Passions and Appetites, far livelier and stronger, that frequently obscure, and sometimes pervert it. Still in Fact, the Duties of Life seem plain to most of us: and so we are tempted to conclude, there is no Occasion for Instruction in them. But how came they to be thus plain? Why, principally because we have always had Instruction. Consider those Nations that have little: for none are intirely destitute; every where Parents teach their Children, and all Men teach one another, something: but still is the Whole of their Duty plain to them? There are doubtless Parts of it, which they cannot well avoid understanding: and they might, with all their Disadvantages, understand more than they do: but can they every one of them, with Ease find out the Whole? How dreadful a Condemnation must they, who affirm this, pass on Millions at once, for having found out so little? We Christians are more charitable, and think their Darkeness, though not a

<sup>f</sup> Luke xii. 57.

Justification, yet a considerable Excuse: but then we must insist, that Light would be a great Blessing to them, and that Instruction is necessary to introduce it. For what wretched Ignorance of most evident, and what strange Belief of most absurd, Things, in Religion and Morals, doth all History shew to have prevailed, for successive Ages, through Nations, knowing and learned in other Respects, but untaught in this?

Nay, to look no farther than ourselves: how many do we see of low Capacity, that, with the best Help, know little, and, with less, would scarce know any Thing? How many of better Capacity want Leisure from worldly Cares, and would have no Time for Improvement, if the frequent Return of this Day did not give it them? How many, even with Leisure, would never turn their Minds to the Consideration of their Duty, if they were not called to it so loudly here, and Knowledge in a Manner forced upon them? How many indeed, of higher Rank as well as lower, appear after all very poorly grounded in the most important Principles and Precepts?

It must be considered too, that our own Reason, had we ever so much of it, and ever



so much Time and Inclination to use it, cannot teach us all that we are concerned to know; but there are Doctrines of the greatest Moment to fallen Creatures, as we are, to be learnt from Revelation. Nor is it sufficient, that each Man study these in the Bible for himself. God hath expressly provided, that some shall instruct others in them. Books, written in distant Countries and Ages, cannot be intelligible otherwise. And several very interesting Parts of Scripture are plainly such, that were most Men asked, as the Eunuch was by Philip, *Understandest thou what thou readeest?* they must answer, as he did, *How can I, except some Man should guide me?* And well may they admit such Guides, as desire to lead them, only by proving that the Way is right.

But further: were every single Dictate, both of Reason and Revelation, ever so easy to be understood; yet the Number of them, arising from the various Relations, in which we stand to our Maker and our Fellow-creatures, is much too great to afford any Hope of their being all distinctly apprehended by all, unless it be made the Business of some, to point them out to the rest. Or, though we could each,

of ourselves, form a general Notion of the Whole: yet particular Circumstances often perplex a general Duty; and raise considerable Doubts, what ought to be done; where still it is of great Consequence to do right. The very wisest frequently need Advice in such Cases: much more then must it be of standing Use to others.

Besides: what is in itself extremely evident may appear, to a prejudiced Mind, uncertain or absurd. And it is very common for Men to be prejudiced greatly against plain Truths: sometimes through Ignorance or Weakness; but much oftener, that wrong Belief may quiet them in wrong Practice. No one indeed can directly believe what he will, merely because he will: but many have strange Arts of misrepresenting Things, and putting fair Masks upon foul Errors; which public Instruction is excellently fitted to pull off; and preserve all, who are not obstinate in cheating themselves, from final Ruin. Minds that have a wrong Bias, if suffered to proceed without Contradiction, would mould their Religion into almost any Shape they pleased: and great Numbers of well-meaning Persons would either fall of their own Accord, or be led by others, into childish and hurtful Superstitions.

stitutions. For human Nature hath always been found exceeding prone to them: and the preaching of the Gospel in its Purity is the safest and most effectual Preservative against them. But it is not Superstition, or Enthusiasm, alone, that endangers the Welfare of Mankind, whatever some would have us think. These undoubtedly may be pernicious: but Profaneness and Profligateness must: which in all Ages have been too generally practised, but in ours are openly defended. Such a Situation of Things makes it doubly necessary, that Religion and Virtue should have a full Hearing. Whoever barely wishes well to civil Society, cannot fail to be in some Degree concerned for their Support. And whoever is in earnest a Christian, will think it of the highest Importance, to the future as well as present Happiness of Men, that the Arguments for our holy Faith be proposed to the World in their genuine Force; the Objections, which may cause Uneasiness to good Minds, and furnish Matter of Triumph to bad ones, answered; and the disingenuous Artifices of Unbelievers exposed.

But making known to us what we have to do, to hope and to fear, is only the first Advantage of religious Instruction. Though we every one of us knew it completely already; yet

yet unless we always recollected it too, as often as there was Need, and were influenced by it, frequent Admonition would still continue extremely useful. Very often the most acknowledged Truths are the least regarded. They are so familiar to us, that they have no Effect, but when placing them in a stronger Light awakens us into a distincter Attention to them. But especially what affords us no Pleasure, as our Duty too seldom doth, we are very apt to pass over as slightly, as possible. The World attracts our Eye with a vast Variety of Objects, infinitely more agreeable: to these we give up our whole Souls, and are totally lost in vehement Pursuits or vain Amusements. The serious Consideration, what we ought to do in Life; and what will follow, if we do it not; seldom presents itself to us, and is little encouraged, when it doth. If we think, it is of other Matters: if we read, it is for other Purposes: if we have Friends, they will scarce look on it as their Business to be more concerned for us, than we are for ourselves: or, if they were, often they dare not attempt to set us right: and too often they, who pass for such, are most artfully industrious to lead us wrong. Then, besides the Multitudes of those  
who

who are almost absolutely inattentive to their Duty, how many are there, who impose on themselves with flattering Imaginations, that they perform it faithfully, when they do not : blind to Faults and Defects, that every one else discerns in them : proud of merely seeming, or merely superficial, good Qualities ; and having the *Name* and Shew of *living*, while indeed they *are dead*<sup>b</sup> ! Now both the thoughtless and the presumptuous must be brought to a right Sense of their Condition, or they are ruined for ever : and what can be so likely to do this, as the Voice of public Instruction, crying loudly in their Ears ; calling the former from Follies and Vanities to the true Business of Life, and warning the latter against fatal Self-deceit ? Admonitions from this Place confessedly are founded on such an Authority, as warrants us in delivering them with a Spirit and Boldness, that Men would not bear in private : and no Part of our Discourses being ever levelled at any one in particular, we can decently and in-offensively reprove, with whatever Freedom is requisite, the Errors of all in general ; *shewing the People their Transgression, and the House of Jacob their Sins*<sup>a</sup>.

<sup>a</sup> Rev. iii. 1.

<sup>b</sup> If. lviii. 1.

But,

But, supposing Men both acquainted with their Duty, and attentive to their Failures; they may still have great Need of being directed, what Method to take in Order, to a Reformation. Not every one, that desires to become good, any more than every one that desires to become healthy, knows the easiest and safest and speediest Way to it. Here again therefore such, as have made it their Study, may do great Service: animating the dejected, confirming the doubtful, strengthening the weak: informing each, what particular Dangers are in their Circumstances most to be feared, and by what Means to be avoided; when to fly from Temptation, when to stand their Ground against it; how to gain Advantages, how to retrieve Losses, how to bear up under tedious and severe Trials; and become, at Length, in all Things, more than Conquerors. Few, it may be feared, are serious enough to think of these Helps with the Regard, which they deserve. But some, however, God be thanked, both see their Usefulness, and have experienced it. Things of this Nature, indeed, are often most effectually taught in private: but public Instruction also, from Time to Time, enters far into the Particulars

ticulars of them : though it is, and ought to be, more usually employed in furnishing the more general Means and Motives to Piety and Virtue : opposing to the vehement Passions that assault Men, such lively Representations, as every one cannot make to himself, of the Reasonableness, the Beauty, the Excellency, the Rewards of Religion ; the Absurdity, the Deformity, the present Mischiefs, the future Punishments of Sin : stripping each Vice of its specious Disguises, and refuting its plausible Pretences : administering Consolation under the Difficulties of Duty, and the Afflictions of Life : and placing, in a strong Light, both the Glories and the Terrors, that are *ready to be revealed*<sup>k</sup>.

Such are the natural Benefits of religious Instruction : and evidently none can be greater. If it answers its End but imperfectly, and hath often been abused to serve bad Purposes : every good Thing in the World is equally liable to the same Charge. Against Abuses, it is perhaps nowhere better guarded, than in this Nation : nor hath ever been freer from them, than at this Time. Imperfections will always be

<sup>k</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 5.

found in what Men are to execute : and will in all Cafes be represented by many, as greater than they are. Particularly in the present, some will affect to shew their own Wisdom, in censuring what the public Wisdom hath appointed : some will revenge themselves, by condemning an Institution, which must condemn the Notions they advance, and the Lives they lead : some will be prejudiced to its Disadvantage by personal or Party Interests : and others will be provoked, by Dislike of particular Men, to hate the very Office they sustain ; or, by Disapprobation of some Parts of an Establishment, to inveigh against the Whole. And very commonly they, who afford themselves the fewest Opportunities of being acquainted with public Instruction, are loudest in their Complaints, of the wrong and wretched Manner, in which it is given. Now a candid, or an upright Man, would never think himself at Liberty, either to find Faults without impartial Examination, or to exaggerate those which he might apprehend he did find. And a good, or even a prudent Man, far from laying too great a Stress on accidental, or small, Defects and Inconveniences, would labour to conceal, unless it were in order to remedy,



whatever appeared amiss, in a Thing of such general Usefulness. For, if teaching Truth, and cautioning against Error ; if setting before Men, their Duty, and their Interest ; if directing them how to succeed in their Views, and how to escape Dangers ; if supporting them in a right Course of Action, and deterring them from a wrong one, be of Service in any of our Concerns ; it must be of most Service in the most important one of all, Religion. And whoever hath Need, either to be taught what he did not sufficiently know, or to be reminded of what he did not sufficiently consider ; to be restrained from doing Evil, or excited to do Good ; to be comforted under the Afflictions of Life, or encouraged against the Fears of Death ; may certainly be the better, if he will, for the preaching of God's Word. There are few, one should imagine, so perfect, as not to have Room left for receiving Advantage from it, in some of these Ways. And whoever conceives he is, cannot with any Decency tell the World so ; which in Effect he doth, by staying away from it. At least, he cannot think the Bulk of Mankind hath attained to this Height of Knowledge and Goodness : and therefore he ought to countermand, by his Example, what

may

may in all Likelihood be of the greatest Benefit to those amongst whom he lives ; and, in Proportion as it amends and improves them, will be of no small Benefit to himself. .

For, that Instruction always hath had, and will have, a mighty Influence on the Belief and Practice of Mens Duty, not only the Nature of the Thing, but the Testimony of all History, sacred and profane, shews. Our first Parents were instructed by their Creator. Had they not ; how quick soever the Improvements of a self-taught Philosopher may be, when described from mere Imagination, yet Reason and Fact make it highly probable, that even had they continued innocent, they would have been very ignorant for a considerable Time. But the Entrance of Sin must enfeeble and darken their Understandings greatly : and had their Knowledge of what they were to do, been ever so clear, yet, what they were to expect, and on what Terms, when they had failed of doing it, must be so very obscure, that it was of the utmost Importance for God to interpose and inform them ; as we find in Scripture he did by the immediate Notification of a Redeemer. Divine Instruction therefore began Religion ; and human hath

preserved it. Hence that honourable Character, given to *Abraham* by God himself: *For I know him, that he will command his Children, and his Household after him; and they shall keep the Way of the Lord, to do Justice and Judgement*<sup>1</sup>. This pious Care, for which he was distinguished, seems to have been falling into Disregard amongst the other Men of that Age. And the Consequence was, what it always will be. The Separation of Instruction from Worship separated Morals from Piety: and, when this unnatural Divorce brought them to be considered, as independent Things, the Obligations to Virtue were fatally weakened, the Notions of Religion were greatly corrupted, and, in Proportion as Ignorance increased, Wickedness and Superstition prevailed.

Still there were, in the Heathen World, Persons very eminent for great and good Qualities. And as no stated public Instruction was established among them<sup>m</sup>; they are sometimes produced, as Arguments against the Need of it. But their Number by no Means appears to have been considerable. Less had been said of them, if the Generality of their

<sup>1</sup> Gen. xviii. 19.  
6, 7, 16, 22, 26.

<sup>m</sup> See Aug. de Civ. Dei, l. 2. c. 4,

Countrymen had been like them ; and what is said, is delivered by Authors, chiefly desirous of gaining Honour to themselves, by drawing beautiful Pictures of the Merit of their Heroes. Yet, after all, we find that Merit, even according to the most favourable Accounts of it, which heighten it far beyond Truth<sup>n</sup>, mixed with great Blemishes. Their Piety, the first Article of human Duty, if they had any, (for several of their Systems of Philosophy were inconsistent with or unfavourable to it) was grossly idolatrous : their Love of their Country was greatly injurious to their Neighbours ; especially those whom they were pleased to call Barbarians : most of them were polluted with unlawful, some with unnatural, Lusts : and none of them ever shewed that Humility of Heart, and deep Sense of Imperfection and Sin, which belongs to the very best of human Creatures. Still, shining Accomplishments they undoubtedly had ; but they had also generally private Instructors at least, from whose Lessons they might in a good Measure derive them : or copied them, though not taught in Form, from those, with whom they conversed. Or supposing the contrary ; in every Science, in every common Art, some few will make a

<sup>n</sup> See Leland against Tindal, Introd. p. 46, &c.

great Progress with small Advantages for it: but shall we conclude from thence, that any Sort of Knowledge can become general, without being generally taught; and every one do what no one is exhorted, or assisted, to learn? Besides, the original Poverty and Frugality, the accidental Necessities and Distresses, nay the unaccountable Fashions and Fancies of some Countries and Ages, have brought particular Virtues into Practice and high Repute, and they have been greatly celebrated for them; though deserving of the severest Censure for their Faults in other Respects. And, bad as we are at present; it would be doing us great Injustice, to prefer upon the Whole, perhaps the best of the Heathen Times, but certainly the common Run of them, to ours. The Number is great in itself, though small in Comparison, of such as infinitely excel, in Piety, in Benevolence, in Purity of Heart, the utmost Perfection, to which Men, without the Grace of the Gospel, could attain. But not to insist on these, we are without Question in general not only more rational in our Devotions, but milder in our Treatment of each other, and more regular in our Conduct of ourselves. An impartial Reader of the *Greek* and *Roman* Authors, especially of such as  
lived

lived in the Times of which they speak, will easily see and acknowledge this. . But were it otherwise, their wanting Instruction, and our having it, cannot possibly be the Reason, that we are inferior to them : but we, without it, should have been still much worse ; and they, with it, still much better. Indeed, they were sensible, whatever we are, how great Need they had of it : and accordingly the best of them, some after taking long Journeys to inform themselves, made it their Business to teach others, who applied to them, the wisest Rules they could, for the Conduct of Life. But they plainly found, both their Knowledge so imperfect, and their Authority so insufficient ; that they declared, of their own Accord, what many now set themselves to deny ; that Interposition from above was requisite to inform and influence Mankind.

This Advantage the Posterity of *Abraham* enjoyed. And though they did not receive from it near the Good they might ; as indeed we none of us ever do from any Advantage ; yet it produced, besides the more distinguished Examples of Piety and Holiness, mentioned in Scripture, and doubtless many others, a considerable Degree of national Faith in the one true God, and Obedience to his Laws ;

which was not only a Blessing to that single Country, but scattered some Rays of Light through all the People, that sat in Darkneſs round them. And no ſooner had they learnt from their Captivity, inflicted on them for their Neglect of the divine Commands, to ſet up and carry on a more conſtant and extenſive Courſe of Inſtruction, than they had done before, by *reading* and interpreting the Scriptures *every Sabbath Day in the Synagogues*° of every City; than their inveterate, and till then incurable, Diſeaſe of Idolatry ceaſed from amongſt them almoſt intirely; and they preſerved for many Ages a more uniform Regard to their Duty, than they ſeem to have had, ever ſince they were a Nation.

But at Length, even this Method of Inſtruction being corrupted by the eſtabliſhed Diſpenſers of it, *the Light itſelf became Darkneſs*º. And then was the proper Seafon for the great Enlightener of the World to appear: who detected and condemned the Abuſes of this Inſtitution, placed the Conduct of it in better Hands, and forbid his Followers for ever that blind Submiſſion to *the Doctrines of Men, which had made the Commandments of God*

° Acts xv. 21.

º Marth. vi. 23.

*of. no. Effect*<sup>1</sup>. Nor did he only purify, but perfect it with inestimable Additions of new Knowledge: whence he tells his Apostles, immediately after the Text: *Verily I say unto you, that many Prophets and righteous Men have desired to see those Things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those Things which ye hear, and have not heard them.* After which, his concluding Care was to provide, by due Regulations, for the perpetual Support of this Ordinance; and promise the Ministers of it, that *he would be with them alway, even unto the End of the World*<sup>2</sup>. We are therefore not only to esteem it, as a prudent<sup>3</sup> and useful Thing; but to reverence it, as the Appointment of our Lord and Master; and attend on it in faithful Expectation of his Blessing. For under whatever Disadvantages of human Weakness the Gospel is often preached, it is still *the Power of God unto Salvation*<sup>4</sup>, to all that hear it, as they ought. Nor can we hope, that he who *resisteth the proud, but giveth Grace to the humble*<sup>5</sup>, will give it those, who set up their own Wisdom against that of Heaven; which hath expressly ordained *Pastors and Teachers, for*

<sup>1</sup> Matth. xxviii. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Rom. i. 16.

<sup>3</sup> James iv. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Matth. xv. 6, 9.



*the Edifying of the Body of Christ* \*. And so effectually did this Method, unassisted by human Art or Power, build up the Church in Spite of all Opposition of every Kind; that, in a small Compass of Time, the Christian Faith was diffused through the Earth, drove Atheism, Idolatry and Vice into Corners, wherever it appeared; and planted in their Stead, rational Piety, benevolent Virtue, moral Self-government, founded on the sure Prospect of eternal Felicity.

Happy would Mankind have been, had the Purity and good Influence of this excellent Doctrine been preserved, by a careful Use of the Means, that recommended it first. But, by Degrees, Preachers *handled the Word of God deceitfully* †, and Hearers *turned away their Ears from the Truth unto Fables* ‡: Instruction was partly perverted, partly refused: Error and Superstition returned in a new Form, and Ignorance and Wickedness again overspread the World. Once more, two Centuries ago, the Restoration of a preaching Ministry restored Truth and Freedom amongst us: and keeping up a due Respect for it, is our great Security against the dreadful Alternative of open Profaneness and Profligateness, or Popish

\* Eph. iv. 11, 12.

† 2 Cor. iv. 2.

‡ 2 Tim. iv. 4.

Darkness and Tyranny : the former of which Evils, in all Likelihood, if ever it prevails, will soon make Way for the latter. And therefore religious Instruction, which guards us at once against both, is a most important public Good.

Its private Advantage to particular Persons seems indeed often to be small. Multitudes there are, as bad, notwithstanding it, as one can well imagine they would be without it : and for this Reason some deny its Benefit. But surely it is a strange Objection against the Usefulness of a Medicine, that they who refuse to take it, or neglect to take it regularly, are never the better for it. Many despise and ridicule this Institution ; and yet from Time to Time gravely complain of the little Good it doth, whilst they are diligently endeavouring, that it shall do still less. . And of the rest of Mankind, few attend it so constantly as they ought, and fewer still with a due Degree of right Disposition. Yet after all, the Number made truly and inwardly religious and virtuous by it, is not contemptible ; those that are amended in Part, or kept back from being mischievously wicked, are very large : and in how much worse a Condition we should quickly be, were it laid aside, is abundantly  
more

more easy to foresee, than safe to try. Too much Trial indeed we have had already : more than enough to find, that as the Contempt of God's Word and Worship increases, Idleness, Debauchery, Dishonesty, spread through the Generality of Mankind : Evils, which one should think every one is greatly concerned to prevent, but especially the upper Part of the World, both for the Sake of their Inferiors and their own. How far the same bad Consequences have taken Place amongst themselves, might perhaps appear disrespectful to say : but we may surely beg, that they and all Men would seriously consider, what one good Effect they have ever observed to follow from disregarding the appointed Exercises of Religion : in what better Way the Time, allotted for these Exercises, is generally employed by those, who frequent them not ; and what Harm could possibly follow, if, from Obedience to the Command of God, from a Respect to public Authority, from Concern for public Welfare, from Tendernefs for their own private Reputation, and (may we not add ?) from Hope of possibly receiving some little Improvement too, they should prevail on themselves to spend at Church, every Week, a few of those Hours, which they do .  
not

not seem, on other Occasions, to reckon so very precious. Doing this, and requiring those who depend on you to do it also, you cannot have Occasion to regret very bitterly: omitting it, whatever you think now, perhaps you may, certainly you will, repent: God grant the Time may come, before it is too late. Let us therefore now make this, amongst others, one Trial of our spiritual State, whether *we have loved the Habitation of God's House, the Place where his Honour dwelleth*<sup>y</sup>: whether *we receive the Word with all Readiness of Mind*<sup>z</sup>, and *desire the sincere Milk of it*, as St. Peter expresses himself, *that we may grow thereby*<sup>a</sup>. If not, let us stir up ourselves to the more constant and zealous Practice of a Duty, which the Apostle to the Hebrews enjoins as an indispensable one, even in the Midst of severe Persecutions: with whose Words I conclude. *Let us hold fast the Profession of our Faith without wavering, and provoke one another unto Love and good Works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the Manner of some is, but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the Day approaching*<sup>b</sup>.

<sup>y</sup> Pf. xxvi. 8.

<sup>z</sup> Acts xvii. 11.

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Heb. x. 23, 24, 25.



## S E R M O N XII.

LUKE viii. 18.

*Take Heed therefore how ye hear.*

EVERY Advantage, bestowed on us by Providence, is a Trust, of which we must hereafter give Account. The Advantages, which tend more immediately to our Improvement in Piety and Virtue, are a Trust of the most important Kind: and religious Instruction holds a principal Rank amongst these. Its Nature is excellently fitted to do Men Good: the Grace of God is ever ready to accompany it: and yet very frequently it fails of its End. Doubtless too often this is our Fault, who are employed to dispense it. We do not preach, we do not live, as we should: may God be merciful to us and amend us: for heavy will be our Condemnation, if we wilfully transgress, or supinely neglect, either Part of our Duty. But the Word of God, even when delivered by unskilful

skilful and wicked Hands, hath Power enough to produce its Effect, if received as it ought: and though delivered by the ablest and best, too commonly, for Want of being so received, produces none. *Preachers of Righteousness*, from the Days of *Noah*<sup>a</sup> to this, have found their Warnings in a great Measure fruitless. Prophets, expressly commissioned from Heaven, have been rejected or disregarded by those, to whom they were sent. Nay, the Son of God himself, as indeed his whole History, but especially his Parable in this Chapter shews, met with many, in whose Hearts his Doctrine either gained no Reception, or soon withered away, or was choked with Thorns; for a few, who brought forth good Fruit, in a greater Degree or a less. And if it was needful for him, who *spoke as never Man did*<sup>b</sup>, who confirmed his Discourses by Miracles, and adorned both by a Life of perfect Holiness, to bid his Apostles themselves *take Heed, how they heard*: much more ought his Ministers now to give his People the same Caution, and they to observe it. You think, and very truly, that a great deal is incumbent on us: but do

<sup>a</sup> 2 Pet. ii. 5.<sup>b</sup> John vii. 46.

you consider, what is incumbent on yourselves? Our Reasons to desire that our preaching may be successful, are very strong: but yours are yet stronger. If we fail of converting you, provided we endeavour it faithfully, we have *delivered our own Souls*: but if you fail of being converted, you *die in your Iniquity*<sup>c</sup>. The Gospel is *the Savour of Life or of Death*<sup>d</sup>, to all that hear it. Those, who are careful to improve by it, God will bless with further Improvements: those, who are not, he will leave in his just Judgement to grow worse and worse: or, to speak the Language of our Saviour just after the Text: *Whosoever hath, to him shall be given: and whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken even that which he seemeth to have.*

Being therefore so deeply concerned in the Matter, let us all consider, with what Disposition of Heart we ought to receive religious Instruction.

1. And, in the first Place, that we should hearken to it with Attention, is exceedingly plain: for else both speaking and hearing are lost Labour. And yet how many are there, who vouchsafe not even so much Regard to the Doctrine of Salvation? Decency perhaps brings

<sup>c</sup> Ezek. iii. 19.

<sup>d</sup> 2 Cor. ii. 16.



us hither : and a Failure of making our Appearance might be remarked to our Disadvantage : but whether our Minds are absent, cannot be so easily observed : and therefore about that, we are very indifferent. Or we come of Course, without reflecting, what End is designed to be served by it : and, though our Consciences would not let us stay away, yet we have never bethought ourselves, that being here without any Care to become the wiser for it, amounts very nearly to the same Thing. Most however have surely some general Intention of minding what they are about : but in so weak a Degree, that every Suggestion of every Kind overpowers it. Some set their Hearts on the Affairs, and some on the Pleasures of Life so intirely, that these Objects croud in at the most improper Times, and drive out all others. Too many have indulged an indolent Thoughtlessness, till applying their Minds in earnest to any Thing is become extremely difficult and painful to them. Not a few are engaged so deeply in Observation of what they see at Church, that they have no Room left for taking Notice of what they hear. There are Persons too, who have so much to say one to another, that they lose, and make those around them lose, much of what the Preacher

Preacher hath to say to them all. And frequent mutual Informations, it seems, are of such Importance and Necessity to be communicated immediately, that even the Duties of hearkening to God's Word, in the Lessons, and singing his Praises in the Psalms, must give Way to them. But indeed the best disposed, and most considerate, are not so happy always, as to command their own Thoughts. Our Imaginations, however carefully checked, are too apt, on every Occasion, to present us with a Multiplicity of Fancies and Notions, quite foreign to the Business we are upon : but never more so, than in the Midst of our religious Exercises. And when once our Minds are got loose ; an Effect, which the least Accident will produce ; then on they run from one Thing to another, hanging together by some Kind of whimsical Connection, till we are carried we know not whither : and, if we try to recover ourselves, are often lost a second Time in the very Endeavour. Some Degree of this is merely the Weakness of our fallen Condition : and some have by Nature more of it than others : for which they have indeed Cause to be sorry, yet not to think despondingly of their spiritual Condition. But still, too much of it is commonly our own Fault.

We have taught ourselves to be so unsettled as we are, by indulging a languid Indifference to the most interesting of all our Concerns ; and perhaps too, by delighting in the vain Amusement, which these roving Ideas give us, at the most improper Seasons. The Cure of this bad Habit is very difficult : and therefore our Watchfulness against its growing upon us ought to be the greater ; and our Attempts to root it out, more closely followed. We must beg of God Pardon for our past Neglects, and Assistance for the Time to come. We must imprint on our Minds, beforehand, as deeply as ever we can, the Importance of Instruction in our Duty : and come to it with the most deliberate and firmest Purpose of strict Attention. We must call ourselves back immediately, when we find we are wandering : and, without staying at all to discover what it was, that led us off, return without Delay to the Subject before us. We must also make it a Rule to recollect afterwards the principal Things, that have been said to us. For not only this will tie us down to mind them the more, when they are spoken ; but minding them ever so much just then, will singly be of small Benefit : we must think them over and over at Home, till we digest them into lasting Nourishment ;

ment; and, as the Apostle directs, give such *earnest Heed to the Things which we have heard*, that we may not, *at any Time, let them slip*<sup>c</sup>.

2. But hearing God's Word with Attention will probably do us no Good, unless, in the second Place, we hear it also without Prejudice against it: for else we shall attend to it, only to find Fault, invent Objections, and so lead ourselves into Error; which may be worse than Ignorance. Now unreasonable Partiality is Blame-worthy in all Cases: but extremely so, when it operates to the Disadvantage of Religion. The Doctrines of natural Piety and Morality are confessedly of the plainest and greatest Use to the present Peace and Comfort, as well as the future Happiness of Mankind. And those which Revelation hath added, illustrate, confirm and supply the Defects of the former, in the most perfect Degree. Prepossession therefore against either, is Opposition to our own chief Good, to that of the World in general: and every worthy, every prudent Man, who at all understands what Christianity is, cannot but hearken to it with Delight, and heartily wish to find it true; and when he is convinced it is, desire to have it constantly inculcated on himself and his Fellow-

<sup>c</sup> Hebrews ii. 1.

creatures, throughout the Earth. To vain and vicious Minds indeed hearing it faithfully preached must give Uneasiness. But still such Preaching is the most real, the most seasonable and necessary Kindness, that can be done them. Unwelcome Truths will be never the less Truths, but much the more dreadful, for their studying to disbelieve them. And therefore the wicked, beyond all others, are concerned, to take Notice of the Threatenings of the Gospel, lay hold on its Mercies, and examine their Lives by its Precepts; whenever they know, or but suspect, they have acted wrong. Nay, suppose they have no Suspicion of that Sort, yet unprejudiced Attention to the Preaching of it can do them no Harm; and may do them more Good, than they think of. We require no implicit Submission to what we teach. We warn you against it. So far as our Doctrine is discerned by your Reason, or felt by your Consciences, to be true; or appears to stand on the Testimony of God; so far only believe us. *We speak as to wise Men: judge ye what we say*<sup>f</sup>. All that we ask is, judge uprightly. For Prepossession hurries People to condemn, what they will not have Patience to understand:

<sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. x. 15.

they imagine Articles of Faith to be unintelligible, and Rules of Life to be unreasonable, without the least Foundation; and alarm themselves and others with Phantoms, the mere Creatures of their own Fancies.

But though irreligious Prejudices always prevail too much : yet there are Times, when Fashion gives a more than ordinary Countenance to them : when all, that would make a genteel Figure, must throw aside the antiquated Notions of learning their Duty ; and think, or seem to think, ill or meanly of those who are to teach it. Now whether you have Need to learn any Thing which you did not know, or be reminded of any Thing which you had forgotten, or be excited to any Thing which you neglect, or dissuaded from any Thing which you practise, I must leave to your own Consciences. The Word of God, the Wisdom of all civilized Nations, the Judgment and Experience of all wise Men declare that every one hath Need of these Things. And as for us, whose Business is to teach : paying us too much Regard, we acknowledge, is a dangerous Temptation to us ; and may do, and hath done, great Harm to true Religion, to Virtue, to human Society : but paying us too little, is full as likely to do Harm. And

we appeal to yourselves : which Extreme are the People of this Land at present most inclined to ? Certainly you ought to have your Eyes open to our Faults and Imperfections ; else they will increase : but you ought to consider at the same Time, how difficult it is for any Set of Men, and for us in particular, to behave so unblameably, as we should. And indeed while we discharge our Office with any good Degree of Faithfulness, the beneficial Nature of it should methinks intitle us to some peculiar Share of the Good-will and Candour of Mankind. At least, no one should, either designedly or inconsiderately, make such harsh Interpretations of what we say or do, as would be universally thought unjust, or uncharitable, with Respect to any other Men. For such Treatment will not only injure us, but make us in a great Measure useless to those under our Care : which is a Matter of public Concern. They, who are instructed or admonished by one, of whom they think amiss, let him lay before them ever so important Truths, very seldom take much Notice of them. Yet this is one Prejudice against which you ought to guard with your best Diligence. The *Scribes* and *Pharisees* were both ill Men, and our Saviour's bitterest Enemies :

mies: yet since they *sat in Moses' Seat*, were the authorized Instructors of the People, he commanded his Disciples to *observe and do whatsoever Duties they bade them<sup>e</sup>*. Ask your own Hearts then, are you thus disposed in Relation to every Truth, which you hear from us; of whom, we hope, you have Cause to entertain a somewhat better Opinion, than of them?

But they, who have no general Prejudice against religious Instruction or the Dispensers of it, have notwithstanding too often very blameable Antipathies to particular Subjects. Some are highly pleased, when we enlarge on Points of Faith: but hate to hear those of Practice much enforced. Others are for practical Discourses only: and forget, that Faith is the necessary Foundation of them; and if it were not, that God hath the same Right to our believing what he teaches, as to our doing what he requires. Some would have Preaching consist wholly of moral Doctrines; and hold Piety in Contempt, as an useless enthusiastical Thing: though both Reason and Scripture say, *it is the first and great Commandment<sup>h</sup>*. Others despise Morality, as an inferior heathenish Attainment: and think only the sublimer Parts of

<sup>e</sup> Matth. xxiii. 2, 3.

<sup>h</sup> Matth. xxii. 38.



Religion should be taught: though the Apostle saith expressly, *I will that thou affirm constantly, that they, who have believed in God, be careful to maintain good Works: these Things are good and profitable unto Men*<sup>1</sup>. Many will pay great Attention to the gracious Promises of the Gospel: but little or none to its Laws and Threatenings. Or, if they are willing we should dwell on some Precepts, which not they, but their Neighbours, transgress; still they turn a deaf Ear to all that can be said on others: and one would except his unjust Gains, a second his vicious Pleasures, a third his vain Amusements, a fourth his Ill-humour, a fifth his causeless Separation, from being any proper Matter of our Animadversion. In short, with most Hearers, some Points are in such Favour, that they can hardly be repeated too often, or carried too far: and others so unwelcome, that the very Mention of them gives Offence. They have not Patience enough to discern the true State of the Question: much less to observe the Force of the Arguments for it; or consider the Answers to their Objections against it: but reject immediately with Anger, whatever thwarts their Inclination, or preconceived Opinion: unmindful of the Prophet's Reproof

<sup>1</sup> Tit. iii. 8.

to the Jews of old : *This is a rebellious People, that will not hear the Law of the Lord: which say to the Seers, See not: and to the Prophets, Prophecy not unto us right Things, speak unto us smooth Things, prophecy Deceits*<sup>k</sup>. But however apt we are to think otherwise, both our Business and our Interest is, not to shut our Eyes against Instruction, but make Use of the Light it offers ; not to fence against Conviction, but lay open our Hearts to the Impression of Truth, be it ever so painful ; *and receive with Meekness the ingrafted Word, which is able to save our Souls*<sup>l</sup>. For those Duties, which we the least like to hear of, may be, and often are, the most needful to be inculcated upon us of all others. Those Doctrines, of which we are the most firmly persuaded, may, for ought we know, unless we have examined them well, be great Mistakes. And even supposing them true, yet attending only to one Part of the Truth, may lead us into Error.

3. The third Disposition, requisite in attending on the Word of God, is Seriousness of Heart. There are many, who have no positive Prejudices, founded on seeming Arguments against it, but so thoughtless and giddy, that

<sup>k</sup> If. xxx. 9, 10.

<sup>l</sup> James i. 21.

they slight it most surprisingly. At best, they look on what is delivered from hence, as something of Course to be said, and not to be minded. But in their livelier Moods they can divert themselves extremely with the most solemn Exhortations ; and their Gaiety is apt to rise the higher, the more earnestly their Duty is pressed upon them. Now undoubtedly the Exertion of a cheerful Temper, when regulated by good Sense and Propriety, is very innocent, as well as agreeable. But to seek for Matter of Drollery in every Thing ; and dress up Subjects of the utmost Importance in ludicrous Disguises, to delight ourselves and others with laughing at them, is the filliest Affectation of Wit, and the most dangerous Kind of Folly. Remember then : what your Maker enjoins, what your eternal Happiness or Misery depends on, is worthy of the most awful Attention, even of the most sprightly Mind : besides that the same Levity, which inclines Men to play thus with religious Truths, usually disposes them to treat the weightiest Affairs of common Life with the same Sort of sportful Indiscretion, till at Length *the End of that Mirth is Heaviness*<sup>m</sup>, even in this World.

<sup>m</sup> Prov. xiv. 13.

Sometimes indeed Want of serious Regard to what we hear, may not seem altogether inexcusable. Subjects of the greatest Moment may be handled so improperly, as to disgust even the well-meaning; and possibly raise contemptuous, instead of devout Reflections. But as it must be a very wrong Heart, that takes Occasion to be thus moved, where none is given: so if much be given, which surely is not frequently the Case, it cannot be a right Heart, which dwells on such Things only, or chiefly. Consider: here you come, in Obedience to the Appointment of God, to learn or recollect the Doctrines and the Precepts, that lead to Salvation. One or more of them are accordingly laid before you and recommended to you: but unhappily with some Peculiarity, it may be, of Phrase or Manner; some Arguments not of the strongest, some Irregularity of Method, or Want of Liveliness or Prudence; in short, some Mixture or other of human Infirmary. Ought these Defects, be they ever so real, though possibly after all they are but imaginary, to change the important Business you are upon, into an ill-natured Amusement: and turn you aside, from the Improvement of your own Souls, to an idle Criticism upon another Man's Performance? Or is it

it the Concern of every one of us, to profit by all we can, supply what is wanting, add Strength to what is weak ; and pass lightly over the Imperfections of our Instructors, remembering our own ?

But they, who by no Means hear Sermons with Contempt, will yet be far from due Seriousness, if they hear them only with Curiosity. And this it may be feared is a very common Case. We want to have some fashionable Controversy discussed, some difficult Passage of Scripture explained, some darling Speculation enlarged on, some plausible Hypothesis proposed : in a Word something told us, that may prove a pleasing Exercise of our Understandings at the Time, and a Help to Conversation afterwards. Discourses, of which we can make this Use, we seldom think of putting to any better : of such as we cannot, we soon grow weary, and hearken impatiently after other *Teachers having*, as the Apostle expresses it, *itching Ears*<sup>a</sup>. Thus we pay most earnest Attention to what we hear : and receive absolutely no Good from it. For filling our Heads, in this Manner, is rather the Way to corrupt our Hearts, than to amend them. Learning and Ingenuity are doubtless

<sup>a</sup> 2 Tim. iv. 3.

of great Service in explaining, defending, and adorning Religion. But still the Things, which a serious Man will chuse to have most insisted on in the Pulpit, are those which he is most concerned to practise, and most liable to fail in, the plain common Rules of a Christian Life. There is Nothing new perhaps in such Discourses : Nothing, but what you have often heard and well remember. But have you minded it as effectually as you ought ? Searching into this may possibly be new enough to you ; how agreeable, God and yourselves know best : but it is needful, without Question. Repeating to you ever so often the Precepts, which you are conscious you observe, will give you Pleasure. And the more unpleasing the Repetition of the rest is, the more necessary it will be. “ This Kind of Preaching hath no Entertainment in it.” Very true. But is it for Entertainment that you come to the House of God ? Such as do, must not take it amiss to be disappointed ; but submit, instead of what they wish, to have what they want, given them ; the Knowledge of their Duty, their Sins, their Saviour, their Grounds of Hope or Fear in Relation to Eternity. At least, whatever they might like for themselves,

they

they must permit others to *have the Gospel preached to them*•.

But supposing you are ever so desirous to hear Sermons ever so proper: on what Account do you desire it? Perhaps only to enjoy the Satisfaction, which a well-composed Discourse naturally affords. Your Ear is gratified, your Sentiments are enlivened, agreeable Emotions of various Kinds are excited. So the Hearer is pleased, the Speaker commended, and followed; but with no Thought of practising one Word he hath said. This is the Turn of Mind, so admirably described, many Ages ago, by the Prophet *Ezekiel*. *Son of Man, the Children of thy People still are talking of thee<sup>•</sup> by the Walls and in the Doors of the Houses, and speak one to another, every one to his Brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the Word, that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come and sit before thee as my People; and they hear thy Words, but they will not do them: for with their Mouth they shew much Love, but their Heart goeth after their Covetousness; their worldly Desires of whatever Sort. And lo, thou art unto them as a very*

• Matth. xi. 5.

• This is the marginal, and the right translation.

*lively Song, of one that hath a pleasant Voice, and can play well on an Instrument: for they bear thy Words, but they do them not*<sup>a</sup>. Religious Instruction could never be appointed to give such empty, insignificant Delight as this: nor doth it in the least attain its proper End, unless it influences Men to forget the Preacher, and think of themselves: unless it raises in them, not a superficial Complacency, or an idle Admiration; but an awful Solicitude about their eternal Welfare, and that a durable one.

Constitutional Warmth of Temper is often blown up into a pious Flame, that goes out almost as suddenly, as it was kindled. Lively Affections are experienced; excellent Designs are formed; every Thing promises wonderfully well for a Time; and then sinks down into Nothing. Or, it may be, Men are moved anew, and resolve anew, at every good Sermon they hear: but they cool again long before the next, and bring no Fruit to Maturity. Now a Life of religious Feelings and Intentions, with an irreligious Failure of acting suitably to

<sup>a</sup> Ezek. xxxiii. 30, 31, 32.

See an excellent Discourse of *Musonius* the Philosopher on this Subject. *A. Gell*, l. 5. c. 1. See also *Arr. Epict.*, l. 3. c. 23. And the Character of *Socrates's* Discourses given by *Alcibiades* on his own Experience. *Plut. Conviv.* See also *Seneca*, Ep. 52.



them, is not the Life of a Christian, nor will it ever procure us the Reward of one.

4. There still remains then a fourth Requisite, without which, however attentive, impartial, and serious, we are; we shall fall short; but towards which all these Qualities greatly contribute: and what that is, the Apostle plainly signifies to us, where he saith, *The Word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with Faith, in them that heard it*<sup>\*</sup>. And the Faith, that we must have, to make it profit us, is not a mere historical Persuasion of the Truth of the Gospel, though with this we are to begin; but a deep Sense of our Need of God's Mercy promised in it; a thankful Acceptance of the Terms, on which that Mercy is offered; an humble Reliance on a crucified Saviour for Pardon, Grace and Strength; with a firm Dependence on having these Blessings conveyed to us, through a right Use of the Means, which he hath ordained for that End; his Word, and Sacraments, and Prayer. Such *Faith* indeed must come *by hearing* at first, as the Apostle hath observed<sup>\*</sup>. But this is no Objection against the Necessity of exercising it afterwards, in Order to hear as we ought: and exercising duly our

<sup>\*</sup> Heb. iv. 2.

<sup>\*</sup> Rom. x. 17.

present lower Degree of it, is the only Way to obtain a higher. Every one therefore, who desires Benefit from religious Instruction, must attend on it with Humility of Heart, as a fallen, sinful, undeserving Creature; to whom it makes known a Method of Recovery, which of himself he could never have found out or imagin'd. He must *receive it*, when deliver'd conformably to Scripture, *not as the Word of Men, but as it is in Truth, the Word of God*<sup>a</sup>, must labour to strengthen his Conviction of these Things. He must apply earnestly to Him, whose Gift Faith is, for that *Faith* in his Gospel, *which worketh by Love*<sup>b</sup>. For when once we come to love our Maker, our Redeemer, our Sanctifier, we shall hear the very hardest Part of our Duty with willing minds, and perform the Whole with a cheerful and persevering Zeal: till which Time, all remains imperfect and ineffectual. Every Attainment that comes short of uniform universal Obedience, however specious it be, leaves us in Effect very nearly, if not quite, where we were. St. James's Comparison is perfectly just. *Be ye Doers of the Word: and not Hearers only, deceiving your own*

<sup>a</sup> 1 Thess. ii. 13.<sup>b</sup> Gal. v. 6.

*selves. For if any be a Hearer of the Word, and not a Doer; he is like unto a Man, beholding his natural Face in a Glass. For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his Way; and straightway forgetteth what Manner of Man he was".*

Yet this too plainly appears to be the common Method. A great Part, even of those, who come to hear from a Principle of Conscience, such as it is, mind exceedingly little at the Time, reflect less afterwards, and continue just the same Men they were before. They wonder indeed, that their Neighbours take no more Notice of what is said; and can even wrest Passages in Sermons to Meanings, which they were never intended to have, and are scarce, if at all capable of, in order to point them against the Faults of others; while they think not in the least of correcting their own, be they ever so plainly described: as if Religion were made for every one else to practise, but themselves. It would really seem quite impossible, if daily Experience did not shew it, that Men could be told so plainly, and warned so frequently, of Transgressions and Follies, which they cannot deny to be such, by which often they not only do great

▼ Jame. i. 22, 23, 24.

Harm, but suffer great Uneasiness, in this World, and which they are sensible must bring on them, if not forsaken, the heaviest Vengeance of God in the next; yet sit all the While as unconcerned, as if the Discourse were about some perfectly indifferent Matter; and go away at last, without so much as a single Thought of ever changing their Conduct. Or if they do think of reforming, it is at some distant Time; like *Felix*, when they have a convenient Season\*; and this they look on as a very pious Intention: whereas indeed it is only determining to live on wickedly for the present, and leave off they know not when. Or they resolve from henceforward to perform some Parts of their Duty, the more easy, or profitable, or fashionable, perhaps: but neglect the rest, as much as ever. Or they go farther, and will break loose from all their Sins: but they will not avoid those Temptations, that must in all Likelihood bring them back soon into their former Bondage; nor make Use of those Means, that would preserve them from it: Thus, one Way or other, they contrive to bear the Word, and not to do it: and all they

\* Acts xxiv. 25.

get by this artful Management, at St. *James*, in the Passage abovementioned, hath excellently observed, is *deceiving their own selves*. For God we can never deceive ; Men we very seldom do ; nay even ourselves, for the most Part, we are able to cheat but poorly ; and could we succeed in it as completely, as we wish, we should be only the more irretrievably ruined.

*Take Heed therefore, how ye bear : and begin your Care with considering so seriously, and improving so faithfully, what hath been delivered to you for that Purpose now, that you may reap the truest and utmost Advantage you can, from whatever shall be any where taught you hereafter. Laying aside all Malice, and all Guile and Hypocrisy, as new born Babes, desire the sincere Milk of the Word, that ye may grow thereby : grow in Grace, and in the Knowledge of our Lrd and Saviour Jesus Christ : to Him be Glory, both now and for ever. Amen<sup>z</sup>.*

y 1 Pet. ii. 1, 2.

z 2 Pet. iii. 18.











